

ASH Wales Annual Adult Population Survey 2026



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Key findings at a glance

ASH Cymru Wales works in partnership with Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) on the annual Smokefree GB survey. YouGov conducted the 2026 survey online between 18 February and 19 March, asking 1,119 adults aged 18 and over in Wales. ASH Wales helps develop the survey so that Welsh priorities are reflected, then analyses the Wales results to provide evidence for policymakers, public health partners and the media.

This report presents the 2026 findings alongside selected comparisons from 2016 and 2022. With less than four years to reach the Welsh Government's goal of smoking prevalence of 5% or less by 2030, these findings highlight prevention development opportunities.



Key findings on smoking

- 12% of adults currently smoke. The figure is 28% for adults living in social housing and 8% for homeowners.
- 53% of current smokers want to stop.
- Someone smokes in the home most days for 23% of adults living in social housing, compared with 8% of homeowners.

Key findings on vaping

- 12% of adults currently vape; 30% of current smokers also vape.
- 39% of adults who vape say their main reason is to stop smoking, cut down or stay off tobacco.
- Among adults aware of vapes, 54% believe vaping is as harmful as or more harmful than smoking cigarettes, including 53% of current smokers who are aware of vapes.

Public Health Wales position: Vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking, but it is not risk-free. Vapes can help some adults stop smoking; children and people who do not smoke should not vape.

Key findings on public support

- 63% support progressively raising the tobacco age of sale for people born in 2009 or later.
- 86% support requiring tobacco retailers to hold a licence that could be removed following repeated underage sales.
- 75% support a levy on tobacco manufacturers to fund measures to help smokers quit and prevent young people from starting.
- 43% say governments are not doing enough to limit smoking, compared with 11% who say they are doing too much.

Targeting action where smoking and exposure are highest

Smoking and vaping by housing tenure

Housing tenure	Smoke now	Vape now
Homeowners	8%	8%
Private renters	17%	16%
Adults living in social housing	28%	21%

Smoking in the home

Smoking in the home is also more common among adults living in social housing: 23% say someone smokes in their home most days, compared with 8% of homeowners. Among adults living with a child under 18, the figure is 10% in 2026, compared with 13% in 2022 and 16% in 2016. These differences have not been tested for statistical significance. The survey does not tell us whether children were present

Smoking over time

The ASH Wales surveys put adult smoking at 14% in 2016 and 12% in 2026. In 2026, 28% of adults living in social housing smoke, compared with 8% of homeowners. Reaching the 5% target by 2030 will require quit support that reaches the people and communities where smoking remains highest.



Measure	2016	2022	2026
Adults currently smoking	14%	15%	12%
Adults currently vaping	5%	8%	12%
Someone smokes at home most days	14%	14%	12%
Current smokers who want to stop	54%	53%	53%

Smoking and health

Mental health and smoking

Adults who received treatment or prescribed medication for depression in the past year were more likely to report smoking and vaping than those who reported no treatment for the conditions listed in the survey.

Treatment or medication reported for	Smoke now	Vape now
Depression	17%	23%
Anxiety	12%	15%
None of the listed conditions	11%	10%

These findings strengthen the case for offering help to quit smoking as part of mental health care, with advice on the options available. The survey asks adults who vape about their main reason for vaping, including stopping smoking, cutting down or staying off tobacco, but it cannot establish whether vaping led to quitting. Respondents could report treatment for more than one condition, and “none” means none of the conditions listed in the question.

Smoking and long term health

The number of respondents reporting COPD was too small for reliable subgroup reporting, so COPD percentages are not presented here.

Quitting smoking can help prevent COPD from getting worse. People living with COPD who smoke should be offered help to quit as a routine part of their care, with continued support if an initial quit attempt does not succeed.



Vaping and quitting

Why people vape

Among adults who currently vape, 39% say their main reason is to help them stop smoking, cut down or stay off tobacco. Another 22% say vaping helps them cope with stress or mental health. These are respondents' reported reasons; the survey cannot tell us whether vaping helped them quit or improved their mental health.

Among current smokers, 81% have tried vaping and 30% currently vape. The figure is 22% among former smokers and about 2% among adults who have never smoked.

How smokers try to quit

Among adults who have tried to quit smoking, 35% have used a vape, 27% nicotine replacement therapy, 11% a stop smoking service or help from a GP or pharmacy, and 6% prescribed medication. Another 30% did not use any of the methods listed. Respondents could choose more than one method; the figures show what people have tried, not what worked.

More than half of current smokers (53%) express a wish to stop, although their plans and level of determination vary. Among adults who have ever smoked, 79% say they would not start if they could go back in time.

Quit Smoking Support

Among current smokers who were aware of vapes but did not currently vape, 40% said they would be interested in trying one if it were provided free by a health professional, such as a GP, nurse or pharmacist. This measures interest in the offer, not support for a policy.

Misperceptions of Harm

Among adults who have heard of vapes, 54% wrongly believe they are as harmful as or more harmful than cigarettes, including 53% of current smokers. Only 28% say vapes are less harmful. The proportion saying vapes are as harmful or more harmful was around 33% in 2022 and 24% in 2016.

Public Health Wales states that vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking, although it is not risk-free. Clear advice on relative harms can help adults who smoke make informed choices about quitting.



Tobacco and Vapes Act

Public support for the Tobacco and Vapes Act

In 2026, 63% support progressively raising the tobacco age of sale for people born in 2009 or later. The Act also provides for tobacco retail licensing in Wales. Support is strong for licensing and for tighter vape regulation:

Proposal	Support	Oppose
Tobacco retail licence removable after repeated underage sales	86%	4%
Ban sweet names, cartoons and bright colours on vape packaging	80%	6%
Ban vape advertising and promotion at the point of sale	80%	5%
Restrict how vape flavours may be described	72%	5%

Support combines “strongly” and “tend to” support; opposition combines the corresponding oppose responses. These findings show public backing for implementing the Act and using its powers.

Further prevention

Public support for further prevention

Support for smoke-free children’s play areas was 82% in 2016, 89% in 2022 and 93% in 2026. Smoke-free rules were extended to play areas in Wales in 2021. The question wording changed, and differences between years have not been tested for statistical significance, so these figures should be read descriptively rather than as evidence of change caused by the law.

Tobacco manufacturer levy and government action

Support for a levy on tobacco manufacturers to help smokers quit and prevent youth uptake was 73% in 2022 and 75% in 2026. The proportion saying governments are not doing enough to limit smoking was 40% in 2016 and 43% in both 2022 and 2026. In 2026, 11% said governments were doing too much. These figures are presented descriptively; differences between years have not been tested for statistical significance.

Exposure to tobacco smoke

Among adults asked where they encountered other people’s tobacco smoke in the previous three months, 32% report exposure while waiting for public transport. Meanwhile, 77% support smoke-free public transport waiting areas. The table follows the place-by-year format of the 2025 report, with a new column for 2026. A dash means the corresponding year was not included in that report’s comparison.

Smoke-free places

Support for smoke-free places by survey year

Support for banning smoking in...	2026	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
School grounds	93%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Children's play areas	93%	92%	—	89%	89%	—	—	—
Hospital grounds	79%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Public transport waiting areas	77%	75%	80%	—	—	—	—	—
Further education college grounds	69%	66%	72%	68%	—	—	—	—
University and college grounds	66%	63%	69%	63%	59%	64%	—	—
All cars	65%	59%	67%	65%	64%	67%	67%	63%
Outdoor seating at restaurants, pubs and cafés	60%	54%	64%	61%	62%	67%	63%	—
Beaches	60%	56%	59%	58%	64%	—	—	—
Parks	60%	57%	58%	59%	62%	—	—	—

Source: Previous ASH Wales Annual Adult Population Survey reports and the 2026 survey. A dash means no figure was reported for that year



Sources and interpretation

ASH Wales and YouGov online surveys of Welsh adults aged 18 and over: 1,048 respondents in 2016, 1,100 in 2022 and 1,119 in 2026. Figures are weighted and rounded. Published subgroup figures use an unweighted base greater than 80; the 2026 free vape offer question has 87 respondents. COPD subgroup percentages are not reported because the relevant base sizes are too small. Differences between years have not been tested for statistical significance. Survey results cannot establish causation.

