

## Electronic Cigarettes: Q&A

### What are electronic cigarettes?

Electronic cigarettes, or e-cigarettes, are devices that produce vapour from nicotine dissolved in propylene glycol or glycerine. Unlike traditional cigarettes, they do not contain tobacco.

### Who uses e-cigarettes?

Regular use of e-cigarettes is largely confined to current and ex-smokers. Regular use by non-smokers and young people remains very rare. It is estimated that 19.4% of smokers in Great Britain use e-cigarettes in 2016.<sup>1</sup> This has increased from 2.7% in 2010. Approximately 2.8 million adults currently use e-cigarettes in Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

### Are e-cigarettes safe?

Evidence so far suggests e-cigarettes are much safer than smoking tobacco.<sup>2</sup> However, the long term health implications of using these products are unclear. Some traces of toxic chemicals have been found in some products, although generally in much lower levels than tobacco cigarettes.<sup>3 4</sup> Smokers should have access to high quality e-cigarettes to help them to cut down or quit but non-smokers and children should avoid using them.

### Do e-cigarettes help smokers to quit?

Early evidence suggests e-cigarettes may help people cut down or stop smoking.<sup>5</sup> A recent study suggested that e-cigarettes may have contributed to an additional 18,000 long-term ex-smokers in England in 2015.<sup>6</sup> This compares to the number of successful quits (self-reported) through NHS England Stop Smoking Services of almost 200,000 between April 2015 and March 2016.<sup>7</sup> The evidence so far is limited but they represent an exciting opportunity due to their unprecedented popularity. Swapping tobacco cigarettes for e-cigarettes offers smokers an option which is almost certainly less harmful and may help increase the likelihood of quitting entirely. But we would still recommend using free Stop Smoking Services as the most effective way to help smokers quit as we know it can increase the likelihood of successfully quitting by around three times.<sup>8</sup>

### Why are e-cigarettes regulated?

E-cigarettes present an exciting opportunity for smokers to quit, but there are still many unknowns. Regulation has been implemented to improve the quality and safety of e-cigarettes, to maximise their potential to help people stop smoking, whilst minimising the risks of unintended consequences that could promote smoking.

### How are e-cigarettes regulated?

The revised EU Tobacco Product Directive (TPD) came into force on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2016, and created a dual-track approach for regulating e-cigarettes. E-cigarettes that make smoking cessation claims must be licensed as medicines by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). All other e-cigarettes are regulated as consumer products and must adhere to the regulations set out by the TPD.

### Are any e-cigarettes licensed?

The 'e-Voke', manufactured by British American Tobacco, is currently the only e-cigarette licensed as a medicine. It is on the General Sales List for medicines, meaning it can be bought from pharmacies, supermarkets and other retail

outlets without the supervision of a pharmacist. These are sometimes referred to as over-the-counter medicines. However, although granted a license, 'e-Voke' is not yet commercially available in the UK market.

### Can e-cigarettes be prescribed?

GPs and Stop Smoking Services are able to prescribe licensed e-cigarettes alongside other stop smoking medicines. However, the e-cigarette must go through NICE approval before they are funded by the NHS, so decisions regarding covering the cost of the e-cigarettes before NICE approval are up to each local NHS clinical commissioning group. If an e-cigarette is granted approval from NICE, they will be available on prescription and charged like any other medication and normal exemption arrangements will apply including for those on low incomes.

### Are e-cigarettes the reason for less people attending Stop Smoking Services?

The number of people accessing Stop Smoking Services is declining, but this cannot be solely attributed to e-cigarettes.<sup>6</sup> Many other factors are likely to contribute to this decline. For example, mass media quit campaigns have been significantly cut over the same period and there has been major structural changes in England.

### Is there a minimum age for purchasing e-cigarettes?

The UK has introduced a ban on under-18s purchasing e-cigarettes. Given the growth in the e-cigarette market, adequate protections are needed to stop the promotion of e-cigarettes to young people and prevent those under-18 from purchasing them.

### Will the advertising and promotion of e-cigarettes be allowed?

There are concerns that the marketing of these products may appeal to children and non-smokers. The new EU regulations under the Tobacco Products Directive ban the advertising of e-cigarettes in the press, radio, online and on television, unless the e-cigarette is licensed as a medicine by the MHRA. The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) are responsible for regulating non-licensed e-cigarettes. They have recently concluded a consultation into the matter and are likely to publish the outcome shortly.

### Can e-cigarettes be used in indoor public spaces and workplaces?

It is not illegal to use e-cigarettes in enclosed public spaces or workplaces in the UK. However, some businesses have chosen to ban the use of e-cigarettes. There is no current justification based on the evidence to legally ban the use of e-cigarettes in indoor public spaces and workplaces. The limited evidence shows that e-cigarette vapour contains some toxic chemicals, but at much lower levels than cigarette smoke. There is currently no evidence to show second-hand vapour causes harm to bystanders, unlike second-hand smoke which is a known carcinogen.

### Are e-cigarettes a gateway to smoking tobacco?

It has been argued that e-cigarettes could act as a gateway to young people taking up smoking cigarettes, but so far the evidence does not support this. Youth smoking rates continue to decline and regular use of e-cigarettes by young people who have never smoked is very low at between 0 and 1%.<sup>1</sup>

### Will e-cigarettes renormalise smoking?

There are some concerns that seeing people imitate smoking behaviours in public places may increase the acceptability of smoking and lead to young people taking up e-cigarettes or tobacco smoking. But on the other hand,

e-cigarette use may help to denormalise smoking by reducing the number of smoking role models. So far we don't have evidence of either outcome.

### How is the tobacco industry involved?

The tobacco industry has a growing interest in the e-cigarette market and owns several different e-cigarette brands. It is important that the tobacco industry's involvement in this market does not provide them with an opportunity to participate as a stakeholder in public health and influence health policy. Promotion of e-cigarette use should not be used to undermine the fundamental health message that smoking kills.

### Where can I find out more?

For further information please visit our [webpage](#) on e-cigarettes and harm reduction policy or; contact our Tobacco Control team at [tobaccocontrol@cancer.org.uk](mailto:tobaccocontrol@cancer.org.uk).

---

<sup>1</sup> ASH (2016) Use of electronic cigarettes (vapourisers) among adults in Great Britain

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England. E-cigarettes: An evidence update. [A report commissioned by Public Health England.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Williams M, Villarreal A, Bozhilov K, Lin S, Talbot P (2013) Metal and Silicate Particles Including Nanoparticles Are Present in Electronic Cigarette Cartomizer Fluid and Aerosol. PLoS ONE 8(3): e57987. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0057987

<sup>4</sup> Goniewicz et al. (2013) Levels of selected carcinogens and toxicants in vapour from electronic cigarettes. Tobacco Control, doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2012-050859

<sup>5</sup> Hartmann-Boyce J, McRobbie H, Bullen C, Begh R, Stead LF, Hajek P. Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2016, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD010216. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub3

<sup>6</sup> Beard Emma, West Robert, Michie Susan, Brown Jamie. Association between electronic cigarette use and changes in quit attempts, success of quit attempts, use of smoking cessation pharmacotherapy, and use of stop smoking services in England: time series analysis of population trends BMJ 2016; 354 :i4645

<sup>7</sup> Statistics on NHS Stop Smoking Services: England, April 2015 to March 2016 Publication date: August 18, 2016

<http://content.digital.nhs.uk/searchcatalogue?productid=21374&q=stop+smoking+services&sort=Relevance&size=10&page=1%20-%20top>

<sup>8</sup> Kotz, D, Brown, J, West, R (2014) 'Real-world' effectiveness of smoking cessation treatments: a population study. Addiction. 2014 Mar;109(3):491-9. doi: 10.1111/add.12429. Epub 2013 Dec 20.