



## **Irish Heart Foundation**

### **Schools, teachers and parent e-cigarette briefing document**

For young people in primary and secondary schools, as well as at college level, e-cigarettes have become a significant issue.

E- cigarette companies are targeting teenagers and children with marketing tactics, such as online ads, social media influencers, bright, colourful packaging, and sweet, exotic flavours like blueberry, bubble gum, and chocolate.

Young people are being unfairly targeted by massive e-cigarette companies, who are themselves owned by major tobacco companies. The lack of regulation and rules means young people are exposed to these products.

At the Irish Heart Foundation, we believe the Government needs to do much more to protect young people from being targeted by these e-cigarette companies.

This briefing document by the Irish Heart Foundation aims to help schools, teachers, and parents call on the government to take action against e-cigarettes.



#### **E-cigarette briefing box**

##### What are e-cigarettes?

An e-cigarette, also known as a vape is a device which vaporises and delivers a chemical mixture known as an “e-liquid” to the lungs in the form of an aerosol.

### How popular are e-cigarettes among young people?

Between 2015 and 2019, the number of 15 to 16-year-olds who had used a vape at least once (known as *ever-use*) had risen significantly from 23% to 37.2%. The rate of regular (or *current-use*) vaping has also increased in this time from 10.1% to 18.1%<sup>i</sup>.

However, these figures are from 2019, and with disposable vapes becoming increasingly popular in the last few years, it is likely that these figures have grown considerably.

### What is the difference between a disposable and a reusable e-cigarette?

A disposable vape is a small device that is already pre-filled with E-liquid. They are non-rechargeable, cannot be refilled, and once the liquid runs out, you discard the vape altogether.

Unlike the disposable version, a reusable vape requires more work. They are equipped with a rechargeable battery and refillable pods/tanks. They are designed to be reused multiple times. Unlike a disposable vape, they are not thrown away once the liquid has run out.

### Are e-cigarettes harmful to your health?

Although e-cigarettes, both disposable and reusable vapes, are safer than smoking normal cigarettes, they are not harm-free and we do not know the long-term health impact, especially in young people. Vaping can cause poisonings, burns, blast injuries, lung injury and asthmatic attacks<sup>ii</sup>. More evidence shows that using vapes can damage the brain, heart, blood vessels and lungs<sup>iii</sup>.

Irish research also shows that teenagers who use vapes are three to five times more likely to start smoking compared to those who never used vapes<sup>iv</sup>. Both e-cigarettes and normal cigarettes contain an ingredient called nicotine, which is very addictive. Nicotine can harm young people's brain development, which continues into the early to mid-20s<sup>v</sup>.

**E-cigarettes harm children and teenagers, and it is the best course of action never to start. They are very addictive and can lead to smoking, which is highly damaging to your health.**



### Environmental impact of disposable e-cigarettes

E-cigarette waste has a serious environmental impact as they contain plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals, lead, mercury, and flammable lithium-ion batteries, which can leach into waterways, soil, and wildlife<sup>vi</sup>.

Shockingly, in the UK, five million disposable vapes are thrown away each week<sup>vii</sup>. Here in Ireland, an estimated 12.5 million disposable vapes were sold in 2022,<sup>viii</sup> and, likely, these single-use devices were simply binned, adding to our already growing plastic waste problem.

**To protect youth health and the planet's health, the Irish Heart Foundation has called for the government to introduce a full ban on all forms of disposable vapes.**

### How are e-cigarette companies targeting young people?

E-cigarette companies target young people in a range of ways, including:

- Clever online advertisements.
- Influencers on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat.
- Bright, colourful stands in shops and newsagents, known as Point-of-sale (POS).

The big tobacco companies often own the biggest and most popular e-cigarette brands available. The same clever marketing used since the 1950s that made cigarettes so famous is now being used to promote vapes among young people. They are using the same playbook.



At the Irish Heart Foundation, we are campaigning for the government to introduce more rules and regulations that will help protect young people. We believe the following recommendations will make it harder for e-cigarette companies to unfairly target children and teenagers.

**We are calling on the government to:**

- Introduce a full ban on all forms of disposable e-cigarettes.
- Introduce a ban on all e-cigarette flavours, except tobacco flavour.
- Introduce a complete ban on all forms of e-cigarette advertisements, including online.
- Introduce Tobacco 21 – increasing the legal age of sale of all tobacco and e-cigarette products from 18 to 21.

**How can parents, teachers, and schools help?**

- Write to your local TD, councillor, or county council; your voice is hugely valued.
- Ask them what they are doing to help reduce youth vaping and ask them to help introduce the measures we have called for.
- Share this briefing document with your network.
- Review the HSE's [Parent's Information document](#) and its [e-cigarette resources page](#).
- Check out and share our [School Resource page](#) for resources for the classroom.
- Get in touch with the Irish Heart Foundation Advocacy team to see how we can advocate together.

**What can students do?**

- Use the 'Truth about Vaping' PowerPoint on the [School Resource page](#) to learn more about vaping.
- Research the effects of vaping using our [vaping webpage](#) and [factsheet](#).
- Create a [poster](#) or PowerPoint in class to share what they've learned with the wider school community.
- Write to their local TD to share their worries about vaping and ask for change using this [template](#).
- Share the advocacy messages and campaigns from your class with the Schools Team by emailing [schools@irishheart.ie](mailto:schools@irishheart.ie).

## Writing to your local TD

1. Find your local TD here - <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/>
2. Find their email address - [firstname.surname@oireachtas.ie](mailto:firstname.surname@oireachtas.ie)
3. Write your email to them.

What to include in your email?

Writing in your own words is much more powerful than copying a pre-prepared text. You can keep it short, even a paragraph or just a few sentences. Be sure to include:

- Your name, and the town/village you live. Include your age and school name if you are a young person.
- Tell them you are worried about young people vaping.
- Ask them what they are doing to help reduce youth vaping and ask them to help introduce the measures we have called for.

*For more information on this topic, or if you want to help us in our campaign, contact Mark Murphy, Advocacy Manager at the Irish Heart Foundation – [mmurphy@irishheart.ie](mailto:mmurphy@irishheart.ie)*

## References

<sup>i</sup> Sunday S, Hanafin J, Clancy L. Increased smoking and e-cigarette use among Irish teenagers: A new threat to Tobacco Free Ireland 2025. ERJ Open Res 2021; in press (<https://doi.org/10.1183/23120541.00438-2021>).

<sup>ii</sup> Health Research Board. 2020. Electronic cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking initiation in adolescents: An evidence review. Available here: [https://www.hrb.ie/news/press-releases/single-press-release/article/new-health-research-board-evidence-shows-e-cigarettes-are-associated-with-adolescents-starting-to-](https://www.hrb.ie/news/press-releases/single-press-release/article/new-health-research-board-evidence-shows-e-cigarettes-are-associated-with-adolescents-starting-to-sm/#:~:text=E%2Dcigarettes%20acute%20effects%20include,24%20months%20are%20not%20researched)

<sup>iii</sup> European Society of Cardiologists. 2019. Cardiologists establish how e-cigarettes damage the brain, blood vessels and lungs. Available here: <https://www.escardio.org/The-ESC/Press-Office/Press-releases/Cardiologists-establish-how-e-cigarettes-damage-the-brain-blood-vessels-and-lungs#:~:text=Cardiologists%20have%20issued%20a%20stark,heart%2C%20blood%20vessels%20and%20lungs.>

<sup>iv</sup> Health Research Board. 2020. Electronic cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking initiation in adolescents: An evidence review

<sup>v</sup> CDC. 2023. Quick Facts on the Risks of E-cigarettes for Kids, Teens, and Young Adults. Available here: [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic\\_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html)

<sup>vi</sup> Truth initiative. 2021. A toxic, plastic problem: E-cigarette waste and the environment. Available here: <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco/toxic-plastic-problem-e-cigarette-waste-and-environment>

<sup>vii</sup> King, Ben. 2023. Five million vapes thrown away every week – research. Available here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-66740556>

<sup>viii</sup> Byrne, Stephen. (2023). Let's talk about disposable vapes. Voice Ireland. Available here: <https://www.voiceireland.org/news/bandisposablevapes>