# Smoking and vaping: school and teacher resource guide

Schools have an important role to play in providing a protective environment and educating children and young people against the harmful effects of smoking and vaping.

## The facts about smoking and vaping

### What is smoking and vaping?

Smoking is a practice where a substance is burned, creating a smoke that is breathed into the lungs.

Vaping is a process where a liquid is heated, creating a vapour that is breathed into the lungs. Both smoking and vaping involve inhaling chemicals into the lungs which can harm your health.

E-cigarettes, also known as ‘vapes’, are electronic devices that heat a liquid (or ‘juice’) to create an aerosol that users inhale. Using an e-cigarette is commonly called ‘vaping’. E-cigarettes come in all shapes and sizes and can look like a highlighter, a pen or USB.[[1]](#footnote-2)

### What’s inside an e-cigarette?

There are no quality or safety standards for e-cigarettes, or the liquids used in e-cigarettes, meaning their manufacture, contents and labelling are unregulated.

Most e-cigarettes contain [nicotine which is harmful and addictive](https://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-18-harm-reduction/indepth-18b-e-cigarettes/18b-0-introduction). Most e-cigarettes and e-liquids that are labelled nicotine-free, do contain nicotine.[[2]](#footnote-3) [Hazardous substances](https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/smoking-and-tobacco/about-smoking-and-tobacco/about-e-cigarettes#:~:text=Hazardous%20substances%20have%20been%20found,can%20also%20cause%20DNA%20damage), including heavy metals and cancer-causing agents, have been found in the aerosol produced by e-cigarettes.

### How vaping affects a child’s body

Vaping can cause significant harm in the short and long term, even if non-nicotine e-cigarettes are used:

* Short-term effects include vomiting, nausea, coughing, shortness of breath, mouth irritation and asthma
* Long-term effects include lung damage, heart disease and cancers

E-cigarettes haven’t been around long enough to know if they cause other diseases, but most experts think it is likely they will cause lung and mouth cancers.

Nicotine exposure during adolescence can harm brain development and lead to higher risk of addiction.[[3]](#footnote-4) [[4]](#footnote-5) Nicotine is a poison and can make people sick if it is swallowed, and it has been linked to deaths of small children.

Children who use e-cigarettes are more than three times more likely to move onto smoking cigarettes. There have also been cases of e-cigarettes exploding and catching fire.

## Vaping laws

### Smoking and vaping are banned in and around schools

The *Tobacco Act 1987* (the Tobacco Act)bans smoking and vaping on school premises or within 4 metres of any pedestrian access point to school premises.

The smoking and vaping ban applies to:

* anyone present on school premises during and outside of school hours including students, teachers, contractors, parents or carers or the wider community, such as sporting groups
* all activities that take place on school premises including pre-schools, kindergartens, outside school hours care, cultural, sporting or recreational activities and school fetes

Smoking and vaping are also not permitted at school events and excursions held off school premises.

### Health and retail laws

The Tobacco Act regulates where individuals can smoke or vape, as well as the sale and advertising of tobacco and e-cigarette products. It is illegal for any person:

* to sell, barter or exchange any type of tobacco or e-cigarette product to a person under 18 years of age
* to possess an e-cigarette containing nicotine, unless they have a doctor’s prescription
* to smoke or vape in a motor vehicle if a person under 18 years is also present in the motor vehicle.

Information about retailers selling e-cigarette products to minors should be reported to local councils.

For more information about the Tobacco Act, go to [www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/tobacco-act-1987/095](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/tobacco-act-1987/095)

## School obligations

The Department of Education and Training’s [Alcohol and Other Drugs- Students policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/alcohol-and-other-drugs-students/policy) provides schools with information on the whole school approach to reducing alcohol and drug use.

Under this policy, schools must:

* not permit student possession, consumption or selling of alcohol or other drugs on school premises or at camps and excursions
* manage and report any alcohol and other drug related incidents in accordance with the Reporting and Managing School Incidents (including emergencies) Policy and with the procedures as set out in this policy
* take appropriate action as described in the Department’s Alcohol and Other Drugs- Students policy
* consider health and wellbeing support for students, ahead of punitive measures and ensure that students have access to immediate and ongoing support for any substance use issues.

## Smoking and vaping resources for schools

### Department policy resources

**DET Smoking and Vaping Ban policy**

This policy clarifies the law and policy around smoking, including use of e-cigarettes on school grounds. It includes a fact sheet with template wording to help schools communicate about the smoking ban. Read the policy at [www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/smoking-vaping-ban](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/smoking-vaping-ban/policy)

**Alcohol and Other Drugs - Students policy**

Provides schools with information on supporting the whole school approach to reducing alcohol and drug use. Read the policy at www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/alcohol-and-other-drugs-students

### Teaching and learning resources

**Get Ready**A suite of teaching and learning activities for students in years 7-9. It is an evidence-based drug and alcohol education program with lessons specifically covering smoking.

[www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/physed/Pages/drugedulearn.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/physed/Pages/drugedulearn.aspx)

**Healthy Schools Achievement Program**  
The Achievement Program provides a whole of school framework for health and wellbeing. It includes a focused health area on Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs.

<https://www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au/education/schools>

**Guidelines for Schools: Parent Involvement in Drug Education**

Resources and templates to assist with engaging parents and carers in drug education.

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/physed/Pages/drugeduengage

**Positive Choices**   
Education resources and drug prevention programs for schools developed by University of Sydney. Includes drug and alcohol booklets for parents, teachers and students covering e-cigarettes and vaping, an e-cigarette factsheet and webinar.

<https://positivechoices.org.au/drugs-a-z/tobacco>

### Health promotion resources

**Quit Victoria**Offers resources, information and support for people to quit smoking and vaping as well as factsheets for parents and children about. [www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping](http://www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping)

**The Royal Children’s Hospital**

The e-cigarettes and teens factsheethas information on how to talk to teens about the health risks of using e-cigarettes and a podcast episode on vaping created by paediatricians. [www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\_sheets/E-cigarettes\_and\_teens](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/E-cigarettes_and_teens)

**Better Health Channel**

Information on the health effects of smoking, strategies for quitting, statistics and Victoria’s laws on smoking, the dangers of e-cigarettes, liquid used in e-cigarettes and the dangers of nicotine poisoning. [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/smoking-and-tobacco](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/smoking-and-tobacco)

**The Royal Children’s Hospital Video**Contains a video suitable for school staff and parents/carers on health risks of using e-cigarettes.

www.rchpoll.org.au/polls/e-cigarettes-vaping-and-teens-do-parents-know-the-dangers/

**Cancer council: E-cigarettes**

Information on safety of e-cigarettes.

[www.cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/smoking/e-cigarettes](http://www.cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/smoking/e-cigarettes)

**Australian Drug Foundation: Nicotine Facts**

[adf.org.au/drug-facts/nicotine](https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/nicotine/)

### Support from the department

School and area-based health, wellbeing and inclusion workforces can also assist with providing support to students who smoke or vape:

* Doctors in Secondary School Program
* Secondary School Nursing Program
* Student Support Services Program
* Mental Health Practitioners in Schools
* Primary Welfare Officers
* Koorie Engagement Support Officers

Contact your local regional office to connect with these support services.

### Advice services

* **Quitline** provide advice and confidential counselling, including for children from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday. Phone 13 78 48 or go to [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au)
* **DirectLine** is a state-wide alcohol and other drugs advice service offering confidential counselling and referral 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Phone 1800 888 236 or go to [www.directline.org.au](http://www.directline.org.au)
* **Youth, Drugs and Alcohol Advice** provide a youth-specific advice service from 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday. Phone 1800 458 685
* **Alcohol and Drug Foundation** advice line 1300 85 85 84
* **Headspace** offer mental health support online, by phone and in person through headspace centres. Go to [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

1. Source: [E-cigarettes and young people: what you need to know (quit.org.au)](https://www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Source: [E-cigarettes and young people: what you need to know (quit.org.au)](https://www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Source: [Vaping and your health (quit.org.au)](file:///C:/Users/08757128/Downloads/Quit_Infographic_Health_Risks_for_Teens_2021_xhYch5a.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Source: [Kids Health Information : E-cigarettes and teens (rch.org.au)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/E-cigarettes_and_teens/#:~:text=Nicotine%20exposure%20during%20the%20teenage,on%20to%20use%20regular%20cigarettes.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)