

Consensus statement on e-cigarettes



Smoking kills. Helping people to stop smoking completely is our priority.

The purpose of this document is to clarify perceptions about any harms and benefits of using e-cigarettes. It is aimed at both health professionals and the general public.

E-cigarettes have been available for purchase for just over a decade in Scotland. They have become increasingly popular and many smokers report using them.

There is now agreement based on the current evidence that vaping e-cigarettes is **definitely less harmful** than smoking tobacco. Although most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is addictive, vaping carries less risk than smoking tobacco. Thus, it would be a good thing if smokers used them **instead** of tobacco.

Using e-cigarettes without stopping smoking (dual use) does not provide health benefits. Anyone who is using both should be strongly encouraged to stop smoking tobacco as soon as they can.

To be absolutely clear, e-cigarettes are useful for public health and health service purposes only as a potential route towards stopping smoking. Access to e-cigarettes needs to be controlled carefully; they are not products for children or non-smokers.

There is still a lot we do not know about e-cigarettes. They are not risk free, but based on current evidence, they have a much lower risk than tobacco. We need to carry out research to understand these risks but in the meantime we need to make the best use of the situation to reduce tobacco smoking further.

We have two key messages:

- 1** To smokers we say: whether or not you use e-cigarettes, try stopping smoking for the sake of your health and wellbeing and those around you. There is lots of help at hand to help you quit. NHS Scotland stop smoking services are free and are here to help you do that. See www.nhsinform.scot/smokeline
- 2** To health professionals we say: when smokers come to you, advise them about the different ways they can quit and which are most effective. Be clear with them that expert support and medicinal treatments* have the strongest evidence base to help people stop smoking. Do not turn anybody away because they choose to use e-cigarettes.

* Medicinal treatments include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), varenicline (Champix®), bupropion (Zyban®) and behavioural support.

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