



Key Facts About Vapes (e-cigarettes)

According to analysis of the 2018/2019 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey by the Australian National University 8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have vaped. Those who have were younger, male and living in non-remote areas.

What are e-cigarettes?

E-cigarettes, or vapes, are devices that heat a liquid to make a vapour that users breathe in (vaping). Vapes are also called e-cigs, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), or alternative nicotine delivery systems (ANDS). They are battery operated and come in range of shapes and sizes. Some look like tobacco products such as cigarettes or cigars. Others resemble everyday items like pens, lipsticks or memory sticks. Vapes contain a range of chemicals including flavourings. They may or may not contain nicotine. They are sometimes marketed as a way to help people quit smoking.

Can vaping help someone to quit?

There is not enough evidence to show vaping is an effective method for smoking cessation:

- many people who vape carry on vaping on a long-term basis
- people who vape often carry on smoking tobacco as well as vaping (dual use)
- vapes are no more effective than established approaches such as Nicotine Replacement Therapy, Champix®, going cold turkey
- emerging evidence also suggests people who use vaping to quit are more likely to relapse than those using other methods.

Using nicotine vapes as a smoking cessation aid is not recommended as a first-line treatment. In Australia nicotine vapes are known as 'unapproved medicines' because they have not been tested for safety and efficacy by the Therapeutic goods Using nicotine vapes as a smoking cessation aid is not recommended as a first-line treatment. In Australia nicotine vapes are known as 'unapproved medicines' because they have not been tested for safety and efficacy by the Therapeutic goods.

- there are no nicotine vaping products listed on the Therapeutic Goods Register
- nicotine vapes can only be prescribed as a quit smoking aid, by a registered doctor, under a special access scheme.

Further information can be found in The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) guidelines on smoking cessation: <https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/clinical-guidelines/key-racgp-guidelines/view-all-racgp-guidelines/supporting-smoking-cessation>

Vaping and the law

In Australia you must have a valid prescription to buy nicotine vapes or nicotine refills. Nicotine vapes are available in some pharmacies, and from online stores. They are not available in other shops. From 1st October 2021 a valid prescription is also needed to import nicotine vapes and nicotine refills. This includes from an online store, or when travelling to Australia from overseas. More information can be found at: <https://www.tga.gov.au/community-qa/electronic-cigarettes>

Vaping is also covered by state and territory tobacco control laws. For example, it is illegal to vape in legislated smoke-free areas.

What are the risks of vaping?

Vaping may be less harmful than smoking conventional cigarettes, but it is not harm free. The liquids used in vapes contain a range of toxic chemicals. Because vapes are relatively new products, we don't really know how harmful vaping might be:

- vapes have not been around long enough for all the effects to show
- not enough research looking at health effects has been completed
- people who vape are usually former smokers or dual users, so it can be difficult to separate the effects of e-cigarettes from tobacco use.

Emerging evidence suggests vaping may:

- result in severe lung disease
- increase the risk of heart attack
- impact on oral health as much as conventional cigarettes

Some of these harms are caused by the flavours that are added to vapes. Studies have also shown that vapers are exposed to heavy metals such as chromium, nickel and lead in greater quantities than in conventional cigarettes. High concentrations of these heavy metals have been linked to health problems such as cardiovascular disease, brain damage, and cancer.

What are the risks to passive bystanders?

The vapour produced by using e-cigarettes contains toxins. Exposure to some toxins (such as heavy metals) may be greater than in conventional cigarettes. The World Health Organisation states that exposure to these substances should be avoided. Passive exposure to this vapour can aggravate existing chronic health conditions such as asthma or COPD. Although vapour produced by e-cigarettes is probably less harmful to bystanders than cigarette smoke, it is not completely harm free.

Vaping and youth

Vapes are popular with youth and there is a strong link between vaping and smoking. Recent evidence from the Australia shows:

- around 22% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander secondary school students aged 12-17 years have tried vaping;
- one third of youths who had vaped had not previously smoked a cigarette;
- just over a quarter of students who had not used cigarettes before they vaped went on to try smoking once they had tried vaping.

Vaping by youth is a problem because nicotine in vapes can negatively affect adolescent brain development. Non-nicotine vapes still contain toxic chemicals and so pose a potential harm to health. Evidence has also shown that even vapes labelled as nicotine-free can contain some nicotine. Australia's precautionary approach to e-cigarettes helps protect our youth from the harms of vaping.

