Electronic cigarettes: Evidence and policy

- In March 2018 there were over 3 million e-cigarette users in Great Britain.
- Over half of e-cigarette users are now ex-smokers.
- One of the main reasons people say they are using e-cigarettes is to help them quit smoking.

What are electronic cigarettes?
- Electronic cigarettes, e-cigarettes, 'vapes' or 'vapourisers' are not cigarettes and do not contain or burn tobacco.
- When a user draws on the device it heats a liquid – which usually contains nicotine – which produces vapour inhaled by the user.
- Other components of liquids are vegetable glycerine, propylene glycol and, usually, flavourings.

What do e-cigarettes look like?
- There are a range of devices classed as e-cigarettes varying in shape, size and appearance.
- The first e-cigarettes were generally designed to look like tobacco cigarettes. More recent devices look quite different.
- E-cigarettes can be disposable or rechargeable use, a closed capsule or be refillable.
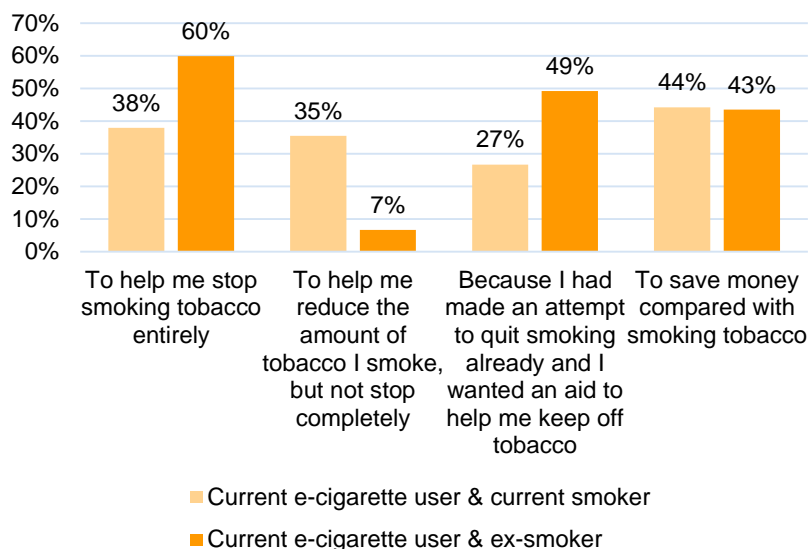
Who is using e-cigarettes
- 6.2% of the British population use e-cigarettes. (ASH 2018)
- Following the trend established in 2017, more than half of e-cigarette users are ex-smokers (55%) and 42% are current smokers.
- Use of e-cigarettes by non-smokers is rare.

Nicotine
- Nicotine is the addictive component of tobacco cigarettes but not the major cause of harm.
- It is the carbon monoxide, tar and other chemicals in the smoke that are lethal.

Popular reasons for using e-cigarettes

Bar chart data:

Reason	Current e-cigarette user & current smoker	Current e-cigarette user & ex-smoker
To help me stop smoking tobacco entirely	38%	60%
To help me reduce the amount of tobacco I smoke, but not stop completely	35%	7%
Because I had made an attempt to quit smoking already and I wanted an aid to help me keep off tobacco	27%	49%
To save money compared with smoking tobacco	44%	43%

■ Current e-cigarette user & current smoker
■ Current e-cigarette user & ex-smoker

In the ASH Smokefree GB survey 2018, the most popular reason given by current e-cigarette users who are ex-smokers for using e-cigarettes was to help them stop smoking entirely.

The most popular reason given by current e-cigarette users and current smokers (dual users) was to save money compared to smoking tobacco. Also popular was to help them reduce the amount they smoke but not stop completely.

How are e-cigarettes regulated?

- E-cigarettes are regulated under the [EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) 2016](#).
- E-cigarettes can also be licensed as medicines by the MHRA. This requires the product to go through a licensing process and meet the standards for medicines.
- While one e-cigarette has been granted a medicinal license by the MHRA it has not been brought to market.

Requirements of the EU TPD

TPD requirements include:
- Notification of new products
- Making all products leak and child tamper proof
- Limiting the size of refillable tanks to 2 ml and bottles of e-liquid to 10 ml.
- Limiting the level of nicotine in e-liquid to 20mg per ml.

Questions

Are e-cigarettes safe?

E-cigarettes are much less harmful than smoking.

A majority of the toxic substance which cause smoking-related disease, such as tar, are absent. Some e-cigarette vapour has been found to contain toxins, however these are at far lower levels than in tobacco cigarettes.

For more information see:
- ASH briefing on [Electronic cigarettes](#)
- PHE: [Evidence review of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products 2018](#)
- Royal College of Physicians: [Nicotine without smoke: Tobacco harm reduction](#)
- NCSCT: [Electronic cigarettes, a briefing for SSS](#)

Do e-cigarettes normalise smoking/act as gateway to smoking?

E-cigarette use by never smokers is rare. In the ASH Smokefree GB Survey 2018 only 0.47% of never smokers said they currently use e-cigarettes.

Among young people, regular use is rare and there's little evidence of a gateway effect. A recent study of over 60,000 teenagers showing no evidence vaping led to smoking among never smokers ([Bauld L. et al 2017](#)).

Policy development

Local approaches to e-cigarettes must be in line with the evidence base.
There are three key areas to consider:

1. **Are the messages you present on e-cigarettes in line with current evidence?** PHE and the Royal College of Physicians have both conducted reviews of the evidence on e-cigarettes concluding that vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking conventional tobacco ([PHE 2018](#), [RCP 2016](#)). This should be reflected in local messages about e-cigarettes and harm reduction.

2. **Do your local stop smoking services support smokers using e-cigarettes to quit?** National guidance is clear that services should provide behavioural support and advice to people using e-cigarettes ([NCSCT 2016](#), [NICE 2017](#)).

3. **Where will you permit or prohibit use of e-cigarettes on council property?** Policies on the use of e-cigarettes should be informed by a desire to promote smoking cessation and ensure compliance with smokefree laws. PHE has developed guidance to help organisations create effective policies ([PHE, 2016](#)).