



## Key Facts About E-Cigarettes

According to the Talking About the Smokes survey, 21% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smokers have tried e-cigarettes. Those who have were daily smokers, living in non-remote areas, and younger.

### What are e-cigarettes?

E-cigarettes are devices that heat a liquid to make a vapour that users breathe in (vaping). E-cigarettes 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. E-cigarettes 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?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has not approved any e-cigarette product as a smoking cessation aid. Overall there is not enough evidence to show e-cigarettes are an effective method for smoking cessation:

- many vapers carry on vaping on a long-term basis
- vapers often carry on smoking tobacco as well as vaping (dual use)
- e-cigarettes 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.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) guidelines on smoking cessation include information about e-cigarettes as a possible second-line treatment to support quitting, but only in very specific circumstances. E-cigarettes containing nicotine can be prescribed by a registered doctor, but only under a special access scheme and on a case-by-case basis. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/clinical-guidelines/key-racgp-guidelines/view-all-racgp-guidelines/supporting-smoking-cessation>

### Vaping and the law

The sale of e-cigarettes containing nicotine is illegal in Australia. E-cigarette use is also covered by state and territory tobacco control laws. For example, it is illegal to use e-cigarettes in legislated smoke-free areas. The Australian Government has also proposed new legislation to limit the import of nicotine for use in e-cigarettes. Under the proposal a valid prescription will be needed to import e-cigarettes containing nicotine and nicotine refills. This includes from an online store, or when travelling to Australia from overseas. This law will come into effect in October 2021. More information can be found at:

<https://www.tga.gov.au/community-ga/electronic-cigarettes>

### What are the risks of vaping?

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

- e-cigarettes have not been around long enough for all the effects to show;
- not enough research looking at health effects has been completed;
- vapers 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 e-cigarettes. 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 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 e-cigarette 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

Access to e-cigarettes may create a new pathway into harmful behaviours for the next generation. E-cigarettes are popular with youth and there is a strong link between vaping and smoking. Recent evidence from the USA shows:

- a 78% increase in the number of teenagers vaping
- increasingly younger initiation of e-cigarette use (from 14 years of age)
- when young people increase their vaping, they often increase tobacco smoking as well

E-cigarette use by youth is a problem because nicotine in e-cigarettes can negatively affect adolescent brain development and non-nicotine e-cigarettes still contain toxic chemicals and so pose a potential harm to health. Australia's precautionary approach to e-cigarettes helps protect our youth from the harms of vaping.

### NBPU Stance

- NBPU supports Australia's precautionary approach to the use of e-cigarettes. **Use of e-cigarettes should not be encouraged** but can be used as a point of discussion around the available best practice quit methods.
- Smokers or vapers attempting to quit should use evidence-based treatments including cold-turkey, NRT, other prescription medications such as Champix® and quit smoking counselling.

