

smoking in pregnancy
challenge group ●

Vaping

before, during
and after pregnancy

Key messages for
maternity and other
healthcare professionals



Key Messages

*This document is a summarised at-a-glance version of the 'Guide for maternity and other healthcare professionals' which can be found on the **Challenge Group website**, along with an infographic for service users.*

- » **In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking.** However, vaping is unlikely to be risk-free, particularly for people who have never smoked.
- » **Smoking tobacco at any point during pregnancy can harm the developing baby.** Stopping smoking is one of the best things a woman and her partner can do to protect the health of their baby through pregnancy and beyond.
- » While licensed nicotine replacement (NRT) products such as patches, gum and inhalers are the recommended option, vapes appear to be more effective for smoking cessation than nicotine patches. Regular use of vapes or NRT during pregnancy does not appear to be associated with any adverse effects in mothers or their babies. If a pregnant woman chooses to vape and if that helps her to quit smoking and stay smokefree, she should be supported to do so.
- » **Vaping without stopping smoking does not provide health benefits; anyone who is using both should be strongly encouraged to stop smoking as soon as they can.**
- » For households with one or more smokers, vapes can be used as a way to maintain a smokefree home and protect children from secondhand smoke.
- » Based on the available evidence on vape safety, there is no reason to believe that vaping would compromise breastfeeding. Women who vape following birth should not be discouraged from doing so if it enables them to maintain a quit attempt and keep their home smokefree.
- » For data recording purposes, a woman who has stopped smoking completely and switched to vaping is classified as a non-smoker.
- » Using a vape can be much cheaper than smoking.

Potential questions & suggested responses

Q What are vapes?

A Vapes, also called e-cigarettes, are designed for users to inhale nicotine through an aerosol commonly referred to as vapour, rather than smoke. They work by heating a solution that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerine, and flavourings. They come in many different shapes and sizes, ranging from disposable, single-use products (which are due to be banned in England, Scotland and Wales) to larger devices which users can adapt and fill with their own liquid, as well as compact 'pod' systems which use e-liquid capsules.

Q How safe are vapes?

A In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking. However, vaping is unlikely to be risk-free, particularly for people who have never smoked. For pregnant women, one large trial found that regular use of vapes or NRT during pregnancy does not

appear to be associated with any adverse effects in mothers or their babies. Unlike cigarettes, vapes don't contain or burn tobacco and don't produce tar or carbon monoxide, which are known to be very harmful to babies.

Q What about the risks from nicotine?

A Both vapes and cigarettes contain nicotine, which makes them addictive. However, most of the harm from smoking comes from the other chemicals in tobacco smoke like tar and carbon monoxide. Nicotine delivered through NRT can be prescribed to pregnant women and is recommended by NICE for smoking cessation during pregnancy.

Q Can I use a vape to help me quit smoking?

A If you are pregnant and you smoke, quitting is the best thing you can do for yourself

and your baby. While licensed NRT products such as nicotine patches, gum and inhalers are the recommended option, if you find using a vape helpful for quitting smoking and staying smokefree, it is far safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke.

Q Can I get a vape on prescription?

A There are currently no vapes with a medicinal licence available on the UK market, meaning they cannot be prescribed by GPs or other healthcare professionals. However, some maternity/ community stop smoking services do provide vapes to pregnant smokers for free, in addition to NRT.

Q I've been using a vape to help me stop smoking – now I'm pregnant, should I stop using it?

A If you feel able to stop vaping or to switch to NRT without going back to smoking then you could try to do so. However, if you think stopping vaping is likely

to cause you to relapse into smoking, you should continue to vape.

Q I have never smoked but I use a vape. What should I do?

A If you vape but have never smoked you could consider stopping vaping. Vapes are an effective quitting aid for people who smoke but they are not risk free and contain nicotine, which is addictive.

Q Is secondhand vapour from vapes harmful to pregnant women?

A Current evidence suggests that short term exposure to e-cigarette vapour is not harmful to health, although it is possible that longer term exposure may carry some low-level risk to people who don't vape or smoke. As a precaution, you could consider not allowing vaping in confined spaces at home or in your car and encouraging others to use nicotine replacement products such as patches, gum and inhalers in these areas

instead. However, any potential risks from secondhand vape exposure are significantly lower than the proven harms from secondhand smoke which increases the risk of stillbirth, miscarriage and sudden infant death (SIDS).

Q Can I use a vape if I'm breastfeeding?

A Based on the available evidence on vape safety there is no reason to believe that using a vape would compromise breastfeeding. If vaping is helping you to quit smoking and stay smokefree, you should carry on with it, including while breastfeeding. As a precaution, you could avoid vaping directly around babies when feeding them.

People who want to quit smoking using a vape should be advised to only use legal, regulated vapes purchased from a reputable source. Illegal vapes often exceed restrictions on nicotine content and may contain banned ingredients.

This document has been endorsed by the following member organisations of the Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group:



Tommy's

Note: This resource is primarily aimed at practitioners working in England but can be used by anyone across the UK.

Disclaimer: The Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group has no affiliation with e-cigarette or tobacco manufacturers.