

31st March 2023

TRi/Mif

Dear Parents/Carers,

The purpose of this letter is to inform and provide you with access to resources on electronic cigarettes/vapes if you feel that your child needs help. We would like to remind parents that the vast majority of young people do not use or have not tried vaping (ASH 2022).

The charity Action for Health and Smoking (ASH) produced a briefing for local authorities with key messages for schools and parents which can be read at ash.org.uk.

What is vaping? Vapes are electronic devices designed to allow people to inhale nicotine in a vapour. Using a vape is known as vaping. Vapes are also available without nicotine (Talk to Frank 2022). In the UK, the NHS recommends vapes for adults to use as an aid to quit smoking tobacco which carries far greater health risks.

Vaping is not recommended for non-smokers or young people. There are some concerns around certain vape products not meeting UK safety standards (ASH 2022). Vaping, though less harmful than smoking tobacco, exposes its users to some toxins that can cause unpleasant health effects, they also often contain nicotine which is an addictive substance that evidence suggests adolescents are more sensitive to (NHS, ASH 2022). It is also important to acknowledge that clinicians do not know the long-term health effects of vaping at this time.

Like cigarettes, vapes are age restricted products and therefore it is illegal for shops and other retailers to sell vaping items including vaping equipment such as liquids to people under the age of 18. It is also against the law to buy vapes on behalf of anyone under the age of 18. It is, therefore, clear that young people under the age of 18 should not be purchasing or be in possession of alternative nicotine products such as vapes. Local councils and schools will pass any reports of shops selling to underage young people, on to Trading Standards.

What are local schools doing about this? We recognise that this is not an issue specific to any individual school but rather one that exists within the community and local area impacting on all schools. We all continue to educate students regarding the health risks of vaping, the significantly greater risks of tobacco smoking and the law. We all remind students of our respective behaviour policies and the list of prohibited items. When students have been found in possession of a prohibited item such as a Vape, a strong sanction is always applied. Please note that we will report possession of any illegal substances to the police.

Vapes can come in a variety of different forms, shapes, and sizes. Some common styles of vapes include ones which look like a thick pen or highlighter pen. These devices are usually very small and can be concealed on a person or blend in with school equipment, therefore they can be easily mistaken or missed.

What can parents do?

- Know and understand the risks presented by smoking, electronic cigarettes and vapes.
- Talk to your child openly about these risks to ensure that they are well informed and have clear guidance that these products are to be avoided.

What steps can I take if my child has used electronic cigarettes/vapes? Some young people may unfortunately choose to vape, and we encourage you to talk to your GP or school if you are concerned about this. You can also find useful information and local support services listed below:

- ASH (Action on Smoking and Health): <https://ash.org.uk/fact-sheets/>
- NHS Better Health- talking to young people about vaping <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quitsmoking/vaping-to-quit-smoking/#young-people>
- Talk to Frank- Vapes <https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/vapes>
- Text for advice from a community school nurse via the ChatHealth service 07312 263194
- Get in touch with the Edge, West Berkshire drug and alcohol service for young people <https://www.wdp.org.uk/west-berkshire-help-for-young-people>

We hope that you welcome this letter in the spirit with which it is intended and that you share and understand our shared concerns about this potentially harmful issue. We have got to be open about the risks involved and we need to be able to talk to our children so that no topics are 'off limits' and so we encourage you to have a conversation with your child about this subject matter. Should you have any concerns, please do contact us and we will provide you with additional support and guidance. Thank you for helping to keep our schools smoke and vape free.

Yours sincerely

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