

## **HEALTH IMPACTS OF E-CIGARETTES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### ***What are e-cigarettes?***

An electronic cigarette, or e-cigarette, is a handheld electronic device used to simulate the experience of smoking a cigarette. It consists of a mouthpiece, a battery, and a cartridge to hold the e-liquid or 'e-juice'. E-cigarettes work by heating a liquid which generates an aerosol or 'vapour' that is inhaled by the user. Using e-cigarettes is commonly referred to as vaping.

### ***What are the health risks?***

E-cigarettes are relatively new products so the evidence is still evolving around their health impacts. Studies have shown that people who vape have slower wound healing and irritated airways. Vaping also has a negative impact on asthma control. There have also been some reports of e-cigarettes exploding and causing fires and injuries.

E-liquids used in e-cigarettes often contain nicotine – a type of poison. E-liquid containers bought online often don't conform to Australian standards, which include having child resistant closures and appropriate labelling. Refill bottles may contain highly concentrated nicotine solutions and just one millilitre can be lethal if swallowed by a child.

### ***Ingredients in e-cigarettes***

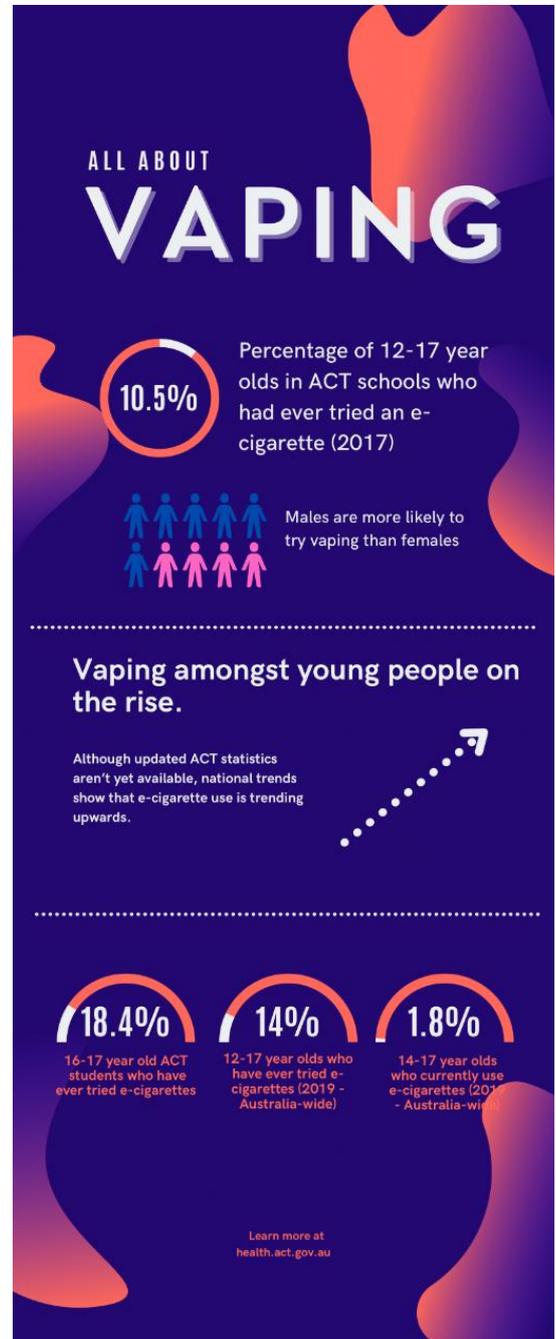
Studies have shown that e-cigarettes are often either unlabelled or inaccurately labelled so you can never be quite sure what's in them. E-liquids contain flavours in combination with propylene glycol, and glycerol. The coil of the e-cigarette releases heavy metals, such as lead and this is inhaled when the e-cigarette is used. Toxic contaminants are also often found in e-liquids, and so is nicotine.

In the ACT, the commercial supply of nicotine for use in e-cigarettes is illegal, however recent testing of online and over the counter e-liquids, labelled as 'nicotine free', found that 60 per cent contained nicotine.

### ***Young people and e-cigarettes***

The brains of young people are at a higher risk of developing nicotine addiction than adults and most smokers commenced their addiction under the age of 21. Nicotine can affect learning, memory, and attention in teenagers.

Young people usually start vaping out of curiosity. Some studies have found that young vapers may be unaware that their vape devices are e-cigarettes, or that they may contain nicotine. They are usually sold as vape pens, vape pod kits, starter kits, vape tanks etc.



### **What do e-cigarettes look like?**

E-cigarettes come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and styles. Online e-cigarette advertising uses the same marketing techniques that were once used to promote tobacco to children and young people. This advertising is illegal in the ACT, but the sellers are based interstate or overseas and the ACT Government has no jurisdiction over online advertisements. E-liquid flavours are often sweet and may look and sound like confectionary. Some of the packaging is likely to be attractive to children, as well as to young adults. See some examples below.



Figure 1 E-Cigarettes come in many shapes & sizes

### **Don't you have to be 18 to buy e-cigarettes?**

Yes, it is illegal to sell e-cigarettes to people under the age of 18 and nicotine is prohibited in e-cigarettes sold in the ACT. Most children access e-cigarette products through a friend or family member. In addition, young people may purchase e-cigarettes online where there are no effective safeguards to stop them from accessing it or from black-market sellers who use social media platforms such as TikTok, Snap Chat and Instagram to sell teenagers e-cigarettes.

### **What can parents and carers do?**

*Learn the facts*

Read through these fact sheets for [parents and teachers](#) and [teens](#), as well as our [myth busters](#). It is also helpful to know what the different devices look like and the different words young people may use to describe using e-cigarettes. This will help you to talk about e-cigarettes with your teen.

*Have a conversation*

It's important to talk to your teen about the health risks of e-cigarettes. Many teenagers are under the misconception that e-cigarettes are safe. Approach the conversation calmly and ask questions. Try not to lecture or judge

*Call Quitline (13 7848) for free advice*

Quitline counsellors can answer any questions you may have about e-cigarettes and can help you think of ways to approach the conversation.

### **More Information?**

[ACT Health: e-Cigarettes](#)

[National Health and Medical Research Council \(NHMRC\) Statement on Electronic Cigarettes 2017:](#)

[The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne; e-Cigarettes & Teens; 2020](#)

[Raising Children Network: The Australian Parenting Website](#)

[Quit: E-cigarettes and teens: what you need to know; 2021](#)



Figure 2 Packaging of e-liquids designed to appeal to young people