

Schools play a key role in helping young people to stay safe and to make healthy decisions. This factsheet provides an overview of existing evidence-based responses to alcohol and other drugs through a “whole school approach”.

While there are potential health benefits for smokers who switch to therapeutic nicotine vaping products (purchased legally from a pharmacy), this is not the case for young people who are non-smokers.

What can schools do?



Review School alcohol and other drug (AOD) policy

Align school policies, practices and programs so that the response to AOD issues is holistic. While vaping is a relatively new phenomenon, we should use the same principles that we use to respond to other substance issues.



Include vaping into existing universal school alcohol and other drug education

Vaping and tobacco information should be delivered together. The message should be that none of these products are for young people.



Keep young people engaged in school

Disengagement from school increases risk of developing a substance use problem. Overly punitive responses risk student disengagement. Develop sustainable behavioural responses, involve families and the whole school community in the response.



Support young people who are nicotine dependent

Young people who are nicotine dependent may have poor control over their vaping and vape in places where it's not allowed. Nicotine withdrawal symptoms include difficulty concentrating, irritability, restlessness. Discuss withdrawal support options with young people who may be nicotine dependent. This could include a referral to a G.P or Quitline.



Engage families in the response

Ensure families are involved in the schools' responses to vaping. Encourage families to include vaping in their own conversations about alcohol, tobacco and other drug use with young people.



Report retailers who break the law

Non-pharmacy retailers like tobacconists, vape shops and convenience stores **can no longer sell any type of vape e-liquid, device, or accessory, regardless of whether it contains nicotine or not** (this is now illegal). The only place vapes can be legally sold in Australia is from a pharmacy.

To report non-pharmacy retailers illegally supplying vapes call 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

What should be avoided?

One-off “special” presentations

One-off presentations can leave students with the impression that vaping is more common than it really is, which can increase their intentions to try it. Instead, incorporate vaping into existing, ongoing curriculum-based school AOD education.

Use of external presenters

Research on the use of external presenters is inconsistent. Evidence suggests that regular classroom teachers are the most effective at delivering school AOD education. Teachers need training and support to deliver this effectively.

Fear or scare tactics

Fear or scare tactics that over-emphasise or exaggerate harms are not just ineffective, they damage our credibility. Young people stop listening to us. It's better to provide balanced, factual information with a focus on harms that are genuinely likely to be experienced young people.

Dovetail has a best practice guide “Alcohol and other drugs in schools” that includes a set of tools to enhance a school’s response to alcohol and other drugs. To order a free print copy or download an electronic copy go to www.dovetail.org.au

For further information and support in responding to vaping, contact Dovetail on (07) 3837 5621 or info@dovetail.org.au

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