



Worker resource

Harm reduction tips for people who use nicotine vaping products

For individuals who smoke tobacco, vaping can serve as a harm reduction strategy. However, for everyone else, the safest option is not to vape at all as long-term harms from vaping are unknown. Despite this risk, some people will choose to continue vaping. This factsheet outlines various strategies to potentially reduce harm for people who use nicotine e-liquids. Not all suggestions will be relevant to everyone or to every type of vaping device; the unique circumstances of each person should be taken into consideration.

Recommend purchasing vapes from a pharmacy

The only legal place to buy vapes (devices, e-liquids, and accessories) in Australia is from a pharmacy. These products are regulated, requiring strict adherence to set product standards. This includes things like clearly labelled nicotine concentrations and that the product must not contain known banned/harmful ingredients.

Advise caution if buying vapes from the illicit market

Sourcing vapes from the illicit market comes with additional risks. These include possible exposure to banned/harmful ingredients, variable amounts of nicotine and harmful contaminants resulting from poor-quality manufacturing. Additionally, there are risks related to acquiring vapes from the illicit market (e.g. exploitation). Encourage those buying from the illicit market to take caution with products, dispose if concerned and avoid risky situations when acquiring vapes.

Encourage people who “dual use” to quit tobacco

Tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Australia. People who use tobacco as well as vapes (dual use) should be encouraged to switch to vaping only. It's likely this switch will reduce harm in the short to medium term. Long-term harms are still unknown.

Suggest identifying the right nicotine concentration

Fewer puffs are better. For people who are dependent, having their nicotine craving satisfied with just a few puffs is desirable because fewer puffs means less inhalation of the other ingredients in e-liquids that may contribute to long-term harms.

Encourage mindful vaping

Vapes can contain high amounts of nicotine and it can be easy to vape frequently and for longer than planned. This can increase dependence. People should be encouraged to vape mindfully and monitor/set limits on vape use (where, how long, how often). Store vapes out of easy reach between use.

Educate against getting “nic sick”

Too much nicotine can leave people feeling nauseous. Encourage people to start with one puff and allow time for the nicotine to take effect before inhaling again.

Advise people to stay hydrated

Some of the ingredients in vape e-liquids can lead to dehydration. Encourage people to drink water regularly throughout the day.

Encourage good oral hygiene practices

Some studies suggest vaping may impact oral health including increasing bacterial growth that can contribute to dental issues. Encourage good dental hygiene, such as regular brushing and dental checkups.

Suggest not modifying e-liquids

It's unsafe to modify e-liquids by adding other substances or ingredients. Encourage people to avoid this to prevent unintended chemical reactions that could cause adverse health effects.

Advise people not to refill or attempt to recharge disposable vapes

The parts inside are not designed to be re-used and tampering with batteries can cause explosions.

Note: disposable vapes are now banned in Australia.

If it looks, smells, or tastes bad – encourage people to stop using it

A bad or strange taste indicates something is not right and is associated with increased harm. If this is the case, people who use disposable vapes should throw them away. For reusable vapes, people should check if the coil/wick or pod needs replacing, wash e-liquid reservoirs (like tanks) that can be cleaned and refill with new e-liquid.

Educate about “dry puffs/hits”

When a vape runs out of e-liquid, the internal mechanisms dry out and overheat (or burn) which can create harmful toxins that taste bad. This is called a “dry puff/hit”. People should replace the coil/wick or pod. When topping up refillable devices, allow time for newly replaced wicks to thoroughly soak before first use.

Recommend following manufacturer’s instructions

Some devices have customisable features like the ability to adjust temperature. Following manufacturer’s instructions is recommended. Overheating may create harmful toxins and can burn the mouth. If instructions aren’t supplied with the device, they can often be found online.

Encourage maintenance of devices

Re-usable devices need to be maintained. The coil and wick wear out and require frequent replacing. Encourage people to stock up on replacement parts, change as recommended, and clean the mouthpiece daily. People should avoid mixing different e-liquid types or flavours, instead using separate pods or tanks for different e-liquids.

Recommend safe battery management

Batteries can catch fire or explode. As with any battery-powered device, people should keep them away from heat and out of direct sunlight. Charge, store and use as per the manufacturer’s instructions, and only ever use the charger provided. Other chargers (e.g. phone) can overload the battery causing fires. Dispose of old batteries safely at battery recycling points. People can check local government websites for information on safe battery disposal.

Encourage vaping only in places it’s allowed

Vaping may cause harm to others and is not allowed anywhere smoking is banned, e.g., schools and hospitals. If this is difficult for someone, it might indicate nicotine dependence. They should consider talking to a health professional about options to help manage withdrawal symptoms.



Nicotine liquid can be absorbed through the skin and is toxic when ingested. Store nicotine liquid away from children and pets, and wear gloves when topping up refillable vapes. Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 if you are concerned, and call triple zero “000” in an emergency.

Harm reduction strategies for vaping is an emerging topic that requires more research. The strategies in this resource have been developed from existing evidence, the principles of harm reduction, practice-based experience, sector consultation and lived experience of people who vape.