

Guide to using **VAPE CHECK**

Vape Check is a tool to help youth and health workers conduct a one-on-one single session brief intervention with young people who regularly use nicotine vaping products.

The tool provides opportunities to:

- provide information on vaping to young people
- screen for nicotine dependence or risk of dependence
- understand motivations to vape and not vape
- for those who are ready, create a plan to cut back or quit
- suggest harm reduction strategies
- discuss further support as required

Who is Vape Check for?

Vape Check is for young people who vape regularly. It is not intended to be used with young people who have never vaped or only vaped once or twice. Equally, the tool is not designed for people who have obtained prescription liquid nicotine to reduce harm or to quit smoking tobacco.

Engagement, consent, and confidentiality

As with any intervention, it is important the worker has developed a rapport with the young person prior to commencing Vape Check. Additionally, as this tool is designed to facilitate a collaborative discussion, the young person needs to provide consent to engage in the process. Workers will need to consider how to manage confidentiality in the setting in which they work.

Caution

Vape Check is not intended to replace a full clinical assessment and does not assess for suicidal ideation or self-harm. Nor does it assess wider psychosocial factors that may contribute to substance use. Where relevant, a psychosocial assessment should also be completed.

Language

The language used throughout Vape Check has been purposefully selected to make it easy for young people to understand. For this reason, the term “addicted/addiction” has been selected. While the term “dependence” is more appropriate in clinical settings, the aim of Vape Check is to facilitate a conversation with the young person, who may not be aware of clinical terminology.

How to deliver this brief intervention

Brief interventions can be effective for promoting behaviour change. They are most effective when delivered in a supportive, personalised, and non-judgemental manner.

It is important workers read and become familiar with the tool before using it. This will help with the flow and promote a conversational style. Vape Check is not intended to be given to a young person as a worksheet to complete on their own. Vape Check should take between ten and fifteen minutes to complete. The tool can be accessed via www.dovetail.org.au

VAPE CHECK

Worker's notes

This tool is designed to help a worker have a conversation with someone who is frequently using unregulated vapes. That is, vapes purchased without a prescription. It is not designed to be used with people who have never vaped, only vaped once or twice, or adults who are vaping to reduce harm from tobacco smoking.

This icon  indicates a conversation point.

A guide to using this tool can be found at www.dovetail.org.au

This tool will provide you with some useful information and practical tips about vaping. It only takes about 10-15 minutes to complete.



There are no health benefits from vaping for people who don't smoke tobacco. For people who regularly smoke, evidence suggests switching to vaping may be less harmful, but not harmless. Long-term harms of vaping are unknown.

1 START HERE

In the past 3 months, how often have you smoked tobacco?

- Never
- Once or twice only
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily/almost daily

In the past 3 months, how often have you vaped?

- Never
- Once or twice only
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily/almost daily

What age did you first start vaping?

Since you started, has your vape use:

- Increased?
- Decreased?
- Stayed the same?



Most unregulated vapes in Australia contain nicotine even if the label says otherwise. Nicotine is the same chemical in cigarettes that makes you addicted.

2

The following questions will help us work out if you are becoming addicted to nicotine (tick all that apply)

- Have you ever tried to stop vaping, but couldn't?
- Do you need to vape if you're feeling stressed?
- Do you ever have strong cravings/urges to vape?
- Is it hard to keep from vaping in places where you are not supposed to, like school, work or home?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate, or do you get anxious, restless, or irritable if you haven't vaped in a while?
- Do you feel stressed if you can't find your vape or it runs out?

Answering yes to any of these may indicate possible nicotine addiction.




What do you think about this?

Dovetail

Supporting the youth alcohol and other drug sector in Queensland

Using Vape Check

Vape Check has six sections. Although it's ideal to follow the tool sequentially, workers may decide to skip sections that aren't applicable or add extra information to address a young person's unique needs and circumstances.

Throughout Vape Check, you'll notice these speech bubble icons . They indicate opportunities for starting a conversation or providing education.

Section 1 – Frequency of tobacco and vape use

In the past 3 months, how often have you smoked tobacco?

- Never
- Once or twice only
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily/almost daily

In the past 3 months, how often have you vaped?

- Never
- Once or twice only
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily/almost daily

What age did you first start vaping?

Since you started, has your vape use:

- Increased?
- Decreased?
- Stayed the same?

The first section assists workers to understand the frequency of vaping and tobacco use in a young person's life, including whether their vape use has changed over time. This information will inform the direction of the intervention. For example, the young person may have developed a nicotine dependence from smoking tobacco. This should open a broader conversation about nicotine dependence as it relates to both tobacco and vaping. It may not be appropriate to encourage a young person to quit vaping if they are at risk of relapsing to tobacco smoking.

Current evidence indicates that whilst not harmless, in the short and medium-term, vaping nicotine poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking tobacco¹. Young people who smoke tobacco may benefit from ceasing tobacco smoking and switching to vaping only. Once they are ready, they should consider ceasing vaping.


Important: If the young person has never vaped or has only vaped once or twice, Vape Check is not appropriate, and the intervention should be ceased. For these young people, a more general conversation about vaping and nicotine dependence is recommended.

Section 2 – Assessing symptoms of nicotine dependence

The following questions will help us work out if you are becoming addicted to nicotine (tick all that apply)

- Have you ever tried to stop vaping, but couldn't?
- Do you need to vape if you're feeling stressed?
- Do you ever have strong cravings/urges to vape?
- Is it hard to keep from vaping in places where you are not supposed to, like school, work or home?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate, or do you get anxious, restless, or irritable if you haven't vaped in a while?
- Do you feel stressed if you can't find your vape or it runs out?

Answering yes to any of these may indicate possible nicotine addiction.

 **What do you think about this?**

Section two helps to determine whether someone may be dependent on nicotine. The more boxes ticked, the more likely the person is nicotine dependent. This is not a validated measure and is intended as a guide only.

Some questions point to symptoms of nicotine withdrawal and others are symptoms that indicate a loss of control over vaping. We suggest you make this section as conversational as possible and use it as an opportunity to help the young person develop insight into the signs of nicotine dependence.

3

If you buy your vapes...

How often do you buy a new one?

\$ What does it cost you?

\$ How much would this be per year?
(You may need a calculator for this section).

What else could you do with this money?

What do you like about vaping?

E.g. it's fun to do with friends, I like the taste, I find it relaxing

It's good to know the reasons why you vape.

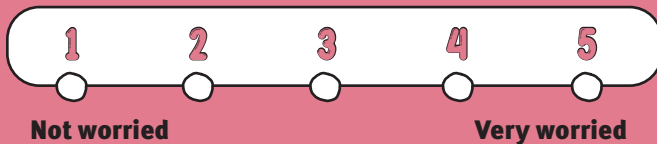
What are the not so good things about vaping?

E.g. I can't leave the house without it, I'm getting in trouble at school

It's helpful to think about ways to reduce negative impacts (even if you're not ready to stop) and keep an eye out if these impacts are getting worse or if the list is growing.

4

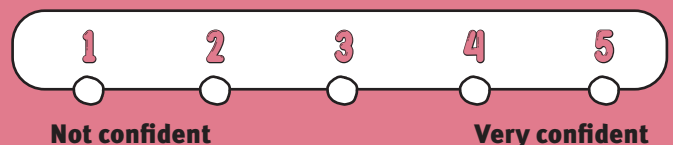
On a scale from 1-5, how worried are you about your vaping?



What would you like to do about your vaping? (tick)

- I want to cut back vaping
- I want to quit vaping
- I don't want to cut back or quit vaping right now (skip to section 6)

If you want to cut back or quit, how confident are you that you can make it happen?



Section 3 – Motivations to vape and not vape

The start of section three asks how much money they're spending and what this would equal over a year. A calculator may be useful here. Working this out and then exploring other ways to spend this money can be a motivator for change. Skip this section if the young person doesn't purchase their vapes.

If you buy your vapes...

Weekly How often do you buy a new one?

\$ 30 What does it cost you?

\$ 1560 How much would this be per year? (You may need a calculator for this section).

What else could you do with this money?

Put it towards the car I want to buy

What do you like about vaping?

E.g. it's fun to do with friends, I like the taste, I find it relaxing

I like to do it with my friends
It helps me relax when I'm feeling stressed

It's good to know the reasons why you vape.

What are the not so good things about vaping?

E.g. I can't leave the house without it, I'm getting in trouble at school

I might get suspended/expelled from school
I sometimes feel short of breath at training
I think I might be getting addicted

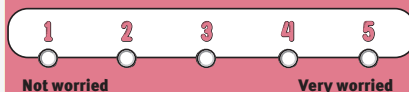
It's helpful to think about ways to reduce negative impacts (even if you're not ready to stop) and keep an eye out if these impacts are getting worse or if the list is growing.

Following the monetary spend questions is a decisional balance activity. Asking "what do you like about vaping" is designed to understand the young person's perspective, because substance use is often driven by a perceived benefit or function. We want to understand what this is, for each person. For example, if a young person answers that a "good thing" about vaping is it helps them relax when they're feeling stressed, we have learned something about their motivation to vape. This can lead to further conversations like, "Can you tell me more about what's making you feel stressed?" "Are there other ways you could try to manage this stress other than vaping?"

The question "What are the not so good things" helps to identify potential motivators for making a change. It can be worth spending more time here to explore the "not so good things". For example, "what will happen if you get suspended from school again?" Or "if things stayed the same, what else might be on this list in twelve months time?"

Section 4 – Readiness for change

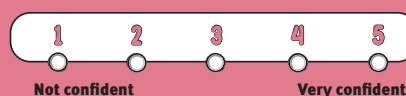
On a scale from 1-5, how worried are you about your vaping?



What would you like to do about your vaping? (tick)

- I want to cut back vaping
- I want to quit vaping
- I don't want to cut back or quit vaping right now (skip to section 6)

If you want to cut back or quit, how confident are you that you can make it happen?



Section four starts by asking how worried a young person is about their vaping. This leads to an opportunity for the young person to consider what they would like to do about their vaping.

They're given three options:

1. cut back vaping
2. quit vaping
3. continue vaping.

It's important we accept the young person's decision. For a young person not ready to make changes, skip to section six, which explores harm reduction strategies. Those who would like to cut down or quit are asked about their confidence in making these changes. It's helpful to identify young people who are "less confident" in making changes, because they are likely to require extra support.



Cutting back or quitting can be easy for some people and hard for others. You may experience withdrawal symptoms – things like difficulty concentrating, being irritable, feeling anxious or having cravings to vape. These withdrawal symptoms will fade within a couple of weeks.

My goal is to... (e.g. cut back to 1 vape a month, stop vaping at school/work, improve my fitness, quit by Christmas)

I'm making a change because...

People who could support me...

Things which might make it hard to reach my goal...

Some steps to help reach my goal are...

Tip: include steps that use your support people, and come up with a plan to deal with the things that might make it hard to reach your goal.

Other strategies you might like to try (tick)

Resist the urge to vape with the “3D’s”

Delay: If you can delay the decision to vape for a few minutes or more, a craving (urge) can pass on its own.

Distract: It's easier to delay the decision if you are doing something to distract yourself (e.g. Snapchat a friend, go for a walk, look at Instagram, listen to music, have a lolly the same flavour as your usual vape, drink some water).

Deep breathing: breathing and other relaxation techniques can help you to stay calm during a craving.

Remember: cravings are like a stray cat – if you keep feeding them, they will keep coming back.

Reduce the temptation to vape

If your goal is to quit vaping, throw your vape out. If your plan is to cut back, put your vape out of reach between use so you're not tempted to use it more. To avoid vaping in places you shouldn't (like schools/public indoor spaces), leave your vape at home.

Learn relaxation strategies

Learning relaxation strategies can help reduce stress, manage cravings and improve overall physical and mental health. Apps about relaxation or mindfulness can be helpful.



Your GP or Quitline can help with strategies and explore options like nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) including patches, lozenges, or gum to help manage nicotine withdrawals and cravings.

Section 5 – Making a plan (for those ready to change)

Section five is only to be completed with people wanting to quit or make other changes, like to reduce their vaping. Young people may need help formulating strategies, but where possible, they should lead the conversation and be encouraged to come up with their own ideas. The worker should encourage specific, achievable and realistic goals. Where it's appropriate to do so, young people should be encouraged to share this plan with their family and recruit them as support people to assist in achieving their goal.

This section may also provide an opportunity to address or reflect on things that were discussed in the decisional balance activity, in section three. For example, if the person identified a “good thing” about vaping was “it helps me relax when I’m feeling stressed”, then “stress” may be identified as a “thing which might make it hard to reach my goal”. You may then want to encourage the young person to consider alternative strategies to manage stress in the “steps to reach my goal” box. Or, if they are worried about school expulsion, consider discussing strategies around managing nicotine dependence to reduce the risk of vaping while at school.

My goal is to... (e.g. cut back to 1 vape a month, stop vaping at school/work, improve my fitness, quit by Christmas)

Cut back to 1 vape a fortnight and stop vaping at school

I'm making a change because...

I don't want to get expelled, and I want to spend less money so I can save for a car

I want to do better in training/make it to regionals

People who could support me...

Mum, Alex and Mrs Smith

Things which might make it hard to reach my goal...

The toilets at school where everyone vapes will be hard

It will be hard to say no at school if one of my friends offers me theirs

I'll want a hit if I'm feeling stressed

My mood

The cravings and feeling crappy

Some steps to help reach my goal are...

Just have a few drags each time I vape, then put it out of easy reach

Don't take my vape to school

Use the bathrooms at the start of break before people go in there to vape

Tell my friends I'm cutting back and ask them not to offer me theirs

Spend more time with Alex who doesn't vape

When I feel stressed, I'll put my headphones on and listen to music to calm down

I'll distract myself by having a lolly when I feel a craving

Tip: include steps that use your support people, and come up with a plan to deal with the things that might make it hard to reach your goal.

6

Reducing harm from vaping

The long-term harms of vaping are unknown, so the safest option is to not vape at all. However, for those that choose to vape, there are some strategies to help reduce risk of harm. **Tick the strategies that you think might work for you:**

Yes No Maybe

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Monitor your mental health
Nicotine addiction can impact your mood and make conditions like anxiety or depression worse. Monitor your mood and seek support if you're worried.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Set limits
Set limits on your vaping, try taking fewer puffs and put your vape out of reach so you are tempted to use less often.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Try to avoid getting "nic sick"
Too much nicotine makes you "nic sick" (e.g. head spins followed by headaches and nausea). Unregulated vapes have varying levels of nicotine. If you are trying a new flavour or brand, start with one puff and allow time for the nicotine to take effect before inhaling again.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Only use vapes as they are intended to be used
It's unsafe to refill or recharge a disposable vape. Internal parts wear out, exposing you to toxic chemicals, and tampering with batteries can cause fires.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Avoid using your device dry
When a vape runs out of liquid, the internal parts start to burn, releasing foul tasting toxic chemicals. This is called "dry puffing". Get a new vape, or top up re-fillable devices when the liquid is low.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Avoid vaping in places where vaping is not allowed
By law you can't vape where you can't smoke. If you struggle with this, you might be addicted to nicotine. If so, discuss your options with a health professional. This might include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) like patches, sprays or lozenges to reduce cravings.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Quit tobacco smoking
If you also smoke cigarettes, switch to vaping only. Once you feel confident you won't go back to smoking tobacco, consider quitting vaping too.</p> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |  | <p>Get a prescription
Switch to prescribed nicotine. Unregulated vapes can contain varying amounts of nicotine and unlisted ingredients including toxic chemicals that are harmful to you and the environment.</p> |

My next steps will be to...

It might also help to...

- Catch up again to discuss my progress
 See a doctor or other health professional
 Call Quitline 13 78 48 for free confidential support to quit vaping

Warning

Store nicotine liquid away from children and pets. Nicotine liquid can be absorbed through the skin and is toxic when ingested. Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 if you are concerned, and call "000" in an emergency.

Section 6 – Harm reduction strategies

All young people who vape can benefit from a discussion about harm reduction strategies. However, harm reduction conversations are particularly useful for young people who are not interested in reducing or ceasing. These approaches accept that despite our best efforts, some young people will continue to vape. The harm reduction strategies provided in Vape Check are not exhaustive. Before exploring the list provided, discuss whether the young person is already using harm reduction strategies. Young people are often interested in their health and may already be taking steps to reduce risks.

“Monitor your mental health”

Some young people report that vaping is having an impact on their mental health. This could be through exacerbating underlying mental health conditions, or it could be because of nicotine dependence impacting their mood.

Have a conversation about any changes the young person may have noticed in their mood or mental health since they started vaping. This can be helpful in raising awareness of the interaction between the two. It is also an opportunity to discuss options for seeking additional support if required.

“Set limits”

A vape contains many “puffs” so it can be easy to vape more frequently and for longer than intended. Encourage the young person to monitor and set limits on their vaping, to reduce frequency of use. For example, using the timer on their phone to set limits.

For young people who are not nicotine dependent, encourage less frequent vaping to avoid developing dependence. You could suggest they set limits on where they vape (for example, “I won’t take my vape to bed with me”) or when they vape (for example, “I will only vape on weekends”).

“Try to avoid getting nic sick”

“Nic sick” is a slang term that describes a set of symptoms caused by inhaling too much nicotine. These symptoms are usually perceived as unpleasant. However, some young people consider it as a “buzz” or “high”. Explore the young person’s perceptions of “nic sick” and let them know that this is their body’s way of telling them they’ve had too much nicotine. These symptoms should subside within a few minutes of ceasing use.

Poisoning can occur if liquid nicotine is consumed orally. Triple zero (“000”) should be called in emergencies or the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) can be called for advice in non-emergency situations.

“Only use vapes as they are intended to be used”

Young people sometimes pull disposable vapes apart in an attempt to recharge the battery and top up the e-liquid to reuse the device. These devices are not made to be reused. The internal parts can wear out, exposing users to toxic chemicals that would otherwise not be released. Tampering with batteries can cause fires.

“Avoid using your device dry”

“Dry puffing” is a slang term that describes a vape that is continuing to be used despite running out of vape liquid. When the taste of the vape changes (usually unpleasant or metallic tasting), the person should be encouraged to throw it away (or top up refillable vapes), because they are likely inhaling toxic chemicals released as the metals and other components overheat.

“Avoid vaping in places where vaping is not allowed”

If a young person is dependent on nicotine, they may have difficulties controlling where and when they vape. When this is the case, it might be worth considering whether nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) could be useful to manage withdrawal symptoms in places where young people are not allowed to vape. While NRT can be purchased over the counter from a pharmacy or supermarket, young people should seek support from an appropriate health professional to discuss their options and learn how to use these products correctly to get the most benefits.

“Quit tobacco smoking”

Where a young person is smoking tobacco and vaping, encouraging tobacco cessation should be a priority. There is good evidence vaping nicotine can help a person quit smoking². Whilst not considered harmless, current evidence suggests vaping is less harmful than smoking tobacco¹.

Nicotine vaping products are not approved smoking cessation aids in Australia. However, doctors may prescribe them as “unapproved products”. Visit the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) Nicotine Vaping Products Hub to learn more.

NRT is an approved smoking cessation aid in Australia and another option to help people quit tobacco. Please note, young people may not require a pharmaceutical aid to quit smoking and behavioural strategies alone may be effective.

Quitline can support young people to quit tobacco using behavioural strategies and can also discuss options like NRT if deemed appropriate.

“Get a prescription”

Encourage young people to avoid using unregulated nicotine vaping products from the illicit market. These can contain unlisted ingredients and variable amounts of nicotine, so people really don’t know what they’re getting. Instead, seeing a GP and switching to prescribed (legal) nicotine liquid means they can have more control over nicotine content and are able to purchase regulated products that meet Australian safety and quality standards.

The final section provides space for identifying next steps. This may be about what the young person needs to do to put their plan or harm reduction strategies in motion. Or, where it's appropriate, you may also use this time to encourage the young person to talk with their family or carers about their vaping.

My next steps will be to...

Share my plan with my support people

Tell my friends I'm cutting back and ask them not to offer me a vape at school

Get a playlist ready for when I feel stressed

It might also help to...

Catch up again to discuss my progress

See a doctor or other health professional

Call Quitline 13 78 48 for free confidential support to quit vaping

This section also includes prompts to book a follow up appointment or to refer elsewhere. For those who planned to quit or to cut back, a follow up appointment is strongly recommended. This provides an opportunity to review what worked, what didn't, make changes to the plan and encourage the young person to keep trying.

The young person may also be encouraged to seek support via a General Practitioner (GP), other relevant health professional or Quitline. Quitline offers support to people (including young people) who vape and want to quit. It's a confidential service where the person can receive support and discuss nicotine replacement therapy, if this is appropriate.

We suggest the young person takes the Vape Check handout with them for future reference if they wish. You may like to take a copy for your own records if it's appropriate to do so.

A final word

Being a brief intervention, this tool is not able to cover everything that may come up in a conversation on vaping. Therefore, other resources may need to be used in conjunction with this tool. We recommend using relevant Australian resources (where possible) that provide factual and well-balanced information. Resources that use fear tactics or exaggerate harms are ineffective and should be avoided.

You can find more information and resources on vaping by visiting www.dovetail.org.au

Vape Check feedback

Vape Check was developed in consultation with workers from the Queensland youth alcohol and other drug sector and then further refined with feedback from over 100 professionals in relevant fields.

Further feedback on this tool is always welcome and encouraged via info@dovetail.org.au or (07) 3837 5621.

References

1. Office for Health Improvement & Disparities. Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update main findings [cited 2023 10 Aug]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nicotine-vaping-in-england-2022-evidence-update/nicotine-vaping-in-england-2022-evidence-update-main-findings>.
2. Hartmann-Boyce J, Lindson N, Butler AR, McRobbie H, Bullen C, Begh R, Theodoulou A, Notley C, Rigotti NA, Turner T, Fanshawe TR, Hajek P. Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2022, Issue 11. Art. No.: CD010216. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub7. Accessed 09 August 2023.