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# Use of e-cigarettes (vaping) in the home: advice for parents

Secondhand smoke is harmful to bystanders and most families in England don't allow smoking in the home. In recent years e-cigarettes have grown in popularity as stop smoking aids and parents are now asking themselves if it's alright to allow vaping indoors. The health risks from vaping are estimated to be a small fraction of the risks from smoking. This guide contains information and practical tips to help you keep yourself and your loved ones safe at home.

## Why is it important to keep a home free from tobacco smoke?

About 7 in 10 people in England don't allow smoking anywhere in the home.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays 9 out of 10 children live in a smokefree home<sup>2</sup>, protecting them from the following risks:

- Health harm – frequent exposure to other people's smoke can increase risks of lung cancer, heart disease and stroke. Secondhand smoke is dangerous for anyone exposed to it, but children are especially vulnerable.<sup>3</sup> Children's exposure to secondhand smoke results in 300,000 UK GP visits and 9,500 hospital admissions a year.<sup>4</sup>
- Copying grown-ups – restrictions on where smoking is allowed influences the way children view tobacco and the likelihood that they will start smoking. In homes where smoking is not allowed indoors, children are less likely to start smoking themselves.
- Fire risk – fires caused by smoking materials including cigarettes, roll-ups, cigars and pipe tobacco, and their associated lighters and matches, are responsible for the greatest number of deaths from house fires.

## To what extent do these risks apply to e-cigarettes?

### Health harm

In contrast to the known harm from secondhand smoke, there's no evidence so far of harm to bystanders from exposure to e-cigarette vapour. The many harmful chemicals in tobacco smoke are either not contained in e-cigarette vapour at all, or are usually found at much lower levels.<sup>5</sup> The risks to bystanders from exposure to e-cigarette vapour are likely to be extremely low, with the most likely effect being limited to irritation of the throat.

## Copying grown-ups

Children's behaviours are driven by the world they grow up in. Younger children watch and copy adults and if vaping takes place in front of them, there is a chance they will want to mimic an adult by playing with an e-cigarette or trying to blow clouds of vapour. To remove these risks, e-cigarettes should be kept out of the reach of children.

A parent or carer who quits smoking in favour of vaping is one fewer smoking role model. However while they will no longer be modelling smoking, they will be modelling vaping. If you find that allowing the use of e-cigarettes indoors helps maintain a smokefree home, you might find it helpful to permit vaping. But if you don't have a problem in maintaining a smokefree home you might want to consider what can be gained from permitting vaping indoors.

## Fire risk

Each year there are about 2,700 smoking-related fires in England, resulting in around 82 deaths.<sup>6</sup> Poorly made or counterfeit chargers for e-cigarettes have caused house fires but this is a much smaller number than cigarettes and there are things you can do to manage these risks. Only buy e-cigarettes from reputable outlets, use the correct charger for the device, follow the manufacturer's instructions and don't leave an e-cigarette charging unattended or overnight. As with other rechargeable electrical equipment including mobile phones and laptops, e-cigarettes should never be charged or used if they've been damaged as damaged battery cells present a chemical and fire risk.

## What about the risk of poisoning and swallowing?

Babies and toddlers are inquisitive and learn about the world by putting things in their mouth. There is a risk of poisoning from e-cigarette liquid and, as with medicines and cleaning products, e-cigarettes and e-liquids should be kept out of the reach of children. After swallowing nicotine fluids symptoms are usually mild and include nausea and vomiting,<sup>7</sup> but serious poisoning can happen after swallowing larger amounts, especially by small children. If e-liquid is swallowed, contact your GP or call NHS 111. In an emergency dial 999.

## Top tips

- If a smoker is not ready to quit, smoking completely outside of the house removes the risks to others from secondhand smoke
- Vaping inside the home poses no known health risks to bystanders and may be helpful in maintaining a smokefree home
- E-cigarettes and e-liquids should be kept out of the reach of children
- Use the correct charger and don't leave an e-cigarette charging unattended or overnight.

**This advice has been produced in consultation with Public Health England.**

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