



## Wise in 5: Teenage vaping

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

It includes a summary of the latest policy developments across the nations, as well as related research from PolicyWISE, The Open University and PolicyWISE's university partners.

PolicyWISE creates neutral and constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge. We support and nurture a common culture of developing and sharing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.



	Illegal to sell to under 18s	Advertising or promotion near schools banned	Banned in public spaces	Standard packaging
England	+			
Northern Ireland	+	💡		
Republic of Ireland	+	💡		
Scotland	+			
Wales	+		⚠️	
Key	+ In effect - Yes	💡 Proposed	⚠️ Considered	

# Wise in 5: Teenage vaping

## Overview

There has been increasing attention on the popularity of vaping amongst teenagers, from media and decision makers, in all the nations of the UK and Ireland.

It is likely that new regulations and/or guidance will come into force in all nations in 2023. This Wise in 5 guide focuses on the increased use of e-cigarettes (vapes) by children and young people under the age of 18.

Vapes had typically been considered a healthy alternative to smoking, and as an aid for smoking cessation. They have been seen as an important tool to help governments achieve ambitions to be smoke-free nations (2030 in [Wales](#) and in [England](#), and 2034 in [Scotland](#)).

[Research](#) suggests, however, that e-cigarette use may serve as a potential risk for the normalisation of smoking, increasing their use and leading to an uptake of smoking and nicotine addiction. The long-term side effects of e-cigarette use on health are unknown. There are also concerns about the use of marketing ploys to attract non-smokers, including children and young people.

Leverage available to (and being considered by) governments and policymakers focus on the sale of e-cigarettes, as well as how they are promoted and their packaging. The concerns and public policy challenges have much in common with

historic and current debates in other areas of public health interventions, such as tobacco, alcohol and processed/unhealthy food.

Following the increase in the age of the legal sale of tobacco from 16 to 18 in 2007 in [England and Wales](#) and [Scotland](#) and 2008 in [Northern Ireland](#), the sale of e-cigarettes to children and young people is illegal across the UK and is being legislated for in Ireland.

However, there is increasing concern about this age group accessing and using vapes. Campaign group Action on Smoking and Health [claim](#) "In March/April 2023 the proportion of children experimenting with vaping had grown by 50% year on year, from one in thirteen to one in nine". According to the Health Service in Ireland, [1 in 5 young people in Ireland](#) say they vape.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) [now says](#) the UK government should "without a doubt" ban disposable e-cigarettes.

According to the Advertising Standards Agency, the Tobacco Products Directive (2016) [prohibits adverts](#) in relation to nicotine-containing e-cigarettes not licensed as medicines on on-demand television, in newspapers and magazines, on the internet, in emails and in text messages.



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# Nation by Nation

## England

[England and Wales legislation](#) made it illegal to sell e-cigarettes to anyone under the age of 18, or to anyone buying on behalf of someone under 18. The [regulations](#) also prohibit the advertising of nicotine-containing electronic cigarettes.

A [statement](#) from the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, in May 2023 highlighted his intentions to end the practice of companies exploiting a loophole in the legislation by giving away free samples.

Following the [Khan Review](#) published in June 2022, the Department of Health and Social Care is considering its recommendations, which include the promotion of vaping as a means to nicotine reduction. The Review will inform the new Tobacco Control Plan, which will be published in due course.

A recent [call for evidence](#) by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities sought to identify opportunities to reduce the number of children aged under 18 accessing and using vape products, while ensuring they are still easily available as a quit aid for adult smokers.

## Scotland

Similar laws apply in Scotland, which came into force in 2017: “A person who sells a nicotine vapour product to a person under the age of 18 commits an offence” and “A person aged 18 or over who knowingly buys or attempts to buy a nicotine vapour product on behalf of a person under the age of 18 commits an offence”.

In January 2023, the Scottish Government began an [evidence review](#) of the environmental impacts of single-use disposable vapes, identifying the hazards attached to both single-use plastics and throw-away batteries.

## Wales

In 2016, the then Welsh Government had intended to ban the use of e-cigarettes in public places but failed to win support in the Senedd.

First Minister, Mark Drakeford, has called this failure one of his [“biggest political regrets”](#), citing:

“the evidence of young people being drawn into nicotine addiction by e-cigarettes is really frightening”.

The need for more research has been highlighted and calls from campaign groups and school leaders for the Welsh Government to ban the sale of vapes.

The [Smoke Free Wales strategy](#) discourages the uptake of e-cigarettes or other nicotine products in teenagers and young people, while also highlighting the need to explore the role of e-cigarettes and other nicotine products for smoking cessation.

## Northern Ireland

It is [an offence](#) for an adult to buy, or try to buy, any tobacco products or nicotine inhaling products (including e-cigarettes/vapes) on behalf of someone under the age of 18 (known as proxy purchasing).

The Northern Ireland Executive has focused on [public health campaigning](#) in schools. In May 2023, the Safer Schools NI Public Health campaigned around educating young people on the dangers attached to vaping.

Unlike Scotland, England or Wales, Northern Ireland does not currently have a target to be smoke free.

## Republic of Ireland

The [Public Health \(Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products\) Bill](#), introduced in May 2023, would prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products to anyone under 18 years. This also prohibits the advertising of nicotine inhaling products around schools and on public transport.

In June 2023, the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications launched a [public consultation](#) to help inform Ireland’s response to disposable vaping devices.

## International learning

Vaping is banned in a number of countries including Singapore and Thailand. The Australian Government is intending to [implement legislation](#) which will outlaw the sale of electronic cigarettes unless accessed through prescription. The Netherlands has recently put forward a [ban on vapes](#) from 1 July 2023, with a sell-out period for shops until 1 October 2023.

In April 2023, the New York Attorney General announced the [final settlement](#) of a lawsuit against [Juul](#) (a well-known vape brand) with an agreement to distribute a \$462 million settlement between six states and Washington DC. The lawsuit accused Juul of targeting under 18s with advertising, failing age verification laws, and allowing the illegal sale of (and exposure to) harmful chemicals that could cause cancer.

## Open University research

[Research undertaken in Scotland](#) in 2016 provided insights into youth perceptions of e-cigarettes – that they were seen as “harmless, affordable, cool and innovative”. They also highlighted “conflicting messages on safety, efficacy, potential ‘gateway’ to smoking and nicotine”.

# Wise up – 5 policy points to takeaway

Five key points from what we’ve learnt above, which could be considered as part of further policy development and delivery in any or all of the nations.

1. It is important that governments commission research focused on the attraction of vaping for young people and the behavioural changes needed to discourage them from experimenting.
2. The role of advertising should be considered, with a focus on social media that targets a younger audience and those who don’t currently smoke.
3. New regulations must also consider the impact and unintended consequences for those that benefit from e-cigarettes as a means to reduce reliance on nicotine and tobacco cigarettes.
4. As policymakers consider these issues, and identify different actions and priorities, it is clear that there would be a benefit in governments learning from each other and from research in understanding the popularity of vaping amongst teenagers.
5. Although this is a relatively new public health challenge, it is important to consider the impact of existing interventions on other issues – for example, smoking in public places, standard packaging, promotion and advertising guidance – and whether they provide a template, or not, for teenage vaping prevention.



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1. **Space:** We create and maintain neutral but constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge.
2. **Sharing:** We develop and support a common culture of sharing and developing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.
3. **Solutions:** We help governments focus on evidence-informed policy solutions for citizens and communities across the nations, informed by comparative and collaborative research and methods.

## Our offer

The PolicyWISE team work with governments, researchers and partners to identify the opportunities for research and evidence to help solve policy challenges across the UK and Ireland. Utilising our distinct focus and skills we deliver impactful and dynamic training for any audience interested in learning how a comparative policy analysis can benefit their work.

We create the right circumstances for meaningful knowledge exchange between and within organisations, whether that is round-tables, seminars or conferences. We bring together thought-leaders from most areas of public policy, helping you find the solutions to the tricky issues you are looking to solve.

**Dewi Knight, Director**

Interested?

## Get in touch



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