



Vaping & the New Australian Regulations

What is Vaping?

Vaping is also known as e-cigs, electronic cigarettes, vapes, vape pens, e-hookahs. Vaping refers to the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol, often flavoured, produced by an electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) or similar device. E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that heat a liquid (e-liquid) to create an aerosol that the user inhales. They look like cigarettes, pens or memory sticks.

E-liquids typically contain nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin, and flavourings.

Many vapes sold illegally at retail stores or online without a prescription don't state they contain nicotine - even though they do.(1, 2) This may mean people using these vapes are dependent on nicotine without realising it. That's a problem because when someone stops using nicotine they go into withdrawal.

Nicotine is a highly addictive and toxic drug that can harm brain development and impact attention, learning, memory and changes in mood.(3) While the long-term harms are not fully known, the National Health and Medical Research Council has advised that "all e-cigarette users are exposed to chemicals and toxins that have the potential to cause adverse health effects".(7)

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms include: (4)

- irritability
- anxiety
- cravings
- having trouble concentrating
- sleep problems
- feeling sad or depressed.

These symptoms usually peak in the first few days after someone stops using nicotine and they start to reduce in the weeks following.

All e-cigarettes, even those that don't contain nicotine, can contain dangerous substances in the liquids and the aerosol. These can include a number of known cancer-causing agents.(3)

New Reforms

New regulations to place stronger controls on the importation, manufacture, and supply of vapes have now been made and are being implemented in stages during 2024. These reforms are designed to protect Australians, particularly young people, from the harms of vaping and nicotine dependence while ensuring vapes remain available to patients with a prescription, where clinically appropriate.

From 1 January 2024, the importation of disposable vapes, irrespective of nicotine content, is banned under the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1958, subject to very limited exceptions (e.g. scientific and medical research). This means that patients cannot purchase disposable vapes online from an overseas supplier, even if they have a prescription.

From 1 March 2024:

- the importation of reusable vapes, irrespective of nicotine content or therapeutic claims, is banned, unless an import licence and permit is obtained. Only businesses will be eligible to obtain a licence and permit.
- the importation of all vapes under the personal importation scheme ends. Patients cannot order vapes, including reusable vapes, directly from overseas, even if they have a prescription.
- travellers entering Australia are banned from bringing vapes into the country, other than for their treatment or the treatment of someone they are caring for, subject to very strict quantity limits (6)

New restrictions to the advertising and promotion of e-cigarettes will also apply from 1 April 2024. (4)

Vapes that do not contain nicotine or any other active ingredient, and that do not make therapeutic claims, can continue to be lawfully supplied in retail stores, subject to compliance with relevant state and territory laws.(5)

What about therapeutic Vapes?

Some therapeutic vapes will be allowed. These are vapes prescribed by a doctor or nurse practitioner for someone quitting smoking, or managing a nicotine dependence (addiction).(6)

The Personal Importation Scheme for vapes will no longer be available and only authorised pharmacies or their suppliers with an import permit will be able to bring any e-cigarettes (with or without nicotine) into the country.(6)

Patients can get further information on how they can lawfully access vapes for use for smoking cessation or the management of nicotine dependence at [Vapes: Information for Patients factsheet](#).

Why the change?

There is growing concern around young people vaping.(6) Young people who vape are 3 times more likely to take up smoking cigarettes.

The [2022-2023 National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022-2023](#) findings showed the use of electronic cigarettes and vapes among people aged 14 years and over nearly tripled between 2019 (2.5%) and 2022-2023 (7.00%). And use appears to be common in young people with around half of people aged 18-24 (49%) had used e-cigarettes and vapes in their lifetime in 2022-2023. For those aged 14 to 17 the increase was more than five-fold with 1 in 4 people age having used e-cigarettes in their lifetime (from 1.8% to 9.7%).(8)

The research shows the top reasons young people are using e-cigarettes are out of curiosity and they taste better than regular cigarettes. In Older people, the top use was to help quit smoking.(8)

What can I do if I currently vape?

If you, or someone in your life, wants to use nicotine vapes to stop smoking or manage a nicotine dependence, talk to a GP.

They may issue a prescription for accessing e-cigarettes legally or provide you with other support and guidance. There's also a range of resources and services that can help people interested in quitting.

Help and resources

- Quit (13 78 48) has a range of resources – including making a quit plan, quitting tips and tactics and resources and factsheets for parents. While some of these are designed for people quitting smoking, they can also be used to help quit vaping.
- Access resources at <https://insight.qld.edu.au/toolkits/vaping/detail>.
- Information for patient factsheet <https://www.tga.gov.au/products/unapproved-therapeutic-goods/vaping-hub/vapes-information-patients>

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