

**Your health and social
care champion**

**Youthwatch
Vaping and Young People Report**

**A report on the findings of a survey
conducted by Youthwatch volunteers**

November 2024



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Introduction

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Social Care Act (2012). Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough is the independent consumer voice for health and social care, listening to the views of local people on issues that matter. Our aim is to ensure that local people have a voice, acting on feedback and driving change.

Our approach

- Listening to people and making sure local peoples voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation, especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing people's experiences to learn, understand and improve health and care.
- Acting on feedback to drive change.
- Partnering with local Government, health and care services and the third sector to make care better, whilst retaining our independence.



The project

Our Youthwatch was set up in June 2023. At an initial meeting, the group discussed the health issues that were of concern to them. From a shortlist, it was agreed that vaping was the most pressing and appropriate issue to research. Vaping was newsworthy at the time with concerns being raised about the prevalence of young people vaping under-age and it becoming a social phenomenon rather than a way to give up smoking. As well as concerns leading to nicotine addiction through the use of vapes. With its consequences to health largely unknown, the group felt this was topical and of great interest to them and other young people.

The following information has been taken from The Cambridgeshire Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing Survey 2022. It was part of 'The Health-Related Behaviour Survey', and was developed by the Schools Health Education Unit, designed for young people of primary and secondary school age. The survey focused on year 8 and 10 pupils, totalling 8390 students.

The report contains detailed information about the health beliefs and behaviour of pupils from Cambridgeshire secondary schools and compares them with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Please note: The statistics below are taken from this report. The first statistic is from the data collected from Cambridgeshire pupils, whilst the second figures is a comparison, from data collected from a larger sample group, which appears in brackets.

On vaping, the survey found.

8% (9%) of pupils responded that they have tried vaping and smoking, while **22%** (23%) said they have tried at least one.

Of the 99 (131) pupils who smoke regularly, **33%** (36%) said they would like to give up.

21% (21%) of pupils responded that they have at least tried vaping, while **5%** (5%) said they vape 'regularly'.

Of the 509 (749) pupils who have tried vaping and smoking, **58%** (57%) said they started vaping first (either nicotine product or cannabis), while **19%** (19%) said they started smoking tobacco or cannabis first.

1% (1%) of pupils responded that they started vaping to help them give up smoking.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough have engaged across the county to examine the current situation around vaping locally, hoping to

better understand prevalence rates, reasons for use and potential health impacts. Our aim is to highlight the views and experiences of children and young people.

Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, there has been an increasing level of concern about the use of e-cigarettes and vapes, particularly single use/disposable vapes, amongst children and young people.

At a local level, the Catch Your Breath, Smoking and Vaping Prevention Service provides information on this subject, which is collated by Healthy Schools Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. They receive many enquiries from schools, organisations and charities for information about vaping and the effects it has on young people.

The Catch Your Breath programme is the only schools-based smoking and vaping service combining prevention and behaviour change approaches in the country to date.

The aim of their work is to equip young people with the knowledge and confidence to support them to engage in positive non-judgemental and honest conversations about vaping.

A national report carried out by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) in 2023 found that 20.5% had tried vaping, compared to 15.8% in 2022, 11.3% in 2021 and 13.9% in 2020.

Data collection for 2020 was mainly conducted prior to the first lockdown, while data collection in 2021 followed almost a year into the pandemic, as we were beginning to emerge from the third lockdown. Lower levels of vaping in 2021 may therefore be associated with the impact of the pandemic on young people's lives. [Use-of-vapes-among-young-people-GB-2023-v2.pdf \(ash.org.uk\)](#)

In Great Britain, the ASH 2023 report [Use of e-cigarettes among young people in Great Britain](#) shows that the vape flavouring most frequently used by children is 'fruit flavour', with 60% of current children using them. 17% of children who vape choose sweet flavours such as chocolate or candy. Youth vaping showed us that children are attracted to the fruit and sweet flavours of vapes, both in their taste and smell, as well as how they are described. Research also shows that [flavours are an important factor in motivating young people](#) to start vaping. Therefore, regulating flavours has the potential to significantly reduce youth vaping.

On 29 January 2024 the Government announced: "Disposable vapes will be banned in the UK as part of ambitious government plans to tackle the rise in youth vaping and protect children's health". This includes:

- A ban on disposable vapes which has driven an alarming rise in youth vaping
- New powers to restrict vape flavours, introduce plain packaging and change how vapes are displayed in shops so they don't appeal to children
- A new law that will make it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009, delivering on the Prime Minister's pledge to create a smokefree generation [Disposable vapes banned to protect children's health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/disposable-vapes-banned-to-protect-childrens-health)
- The government will reduce the appeal and availability of vapes to children by providing powers for the government to regulate:
 - the flavours and contents of vapes
 - the retail packaging and product requirements of vapes
 - the point-of-sale displays of vapes
 - extending the existing offence to sell a nicotine vaping product to a person who is under the age of 18 to non-nicotine vapes for England and Wales
 - introducing a ban on the free distribution of vapes to under 18s for England and Wales
 - updating the existing vape notification system to align with future regulatory requirements
- Vapes are defined in the bill to cover both nicotine and non-nicotine vapes. E-cigarettes are vaping products which contain nicotine.
- The bill also gives powers to extend the measures outlined above to other nicotine products, such as nicotine patches.

How are the rules on vapes changing?

As part of its plans to create a smoke-free generation, the former Conservative government announced changes to the rules around vapes, including:

- a ban on disposable vapes, to be introduced in April 2025
- a new tax on vaping products, to be introduced in October 2026
- marketing restrictions on vapes to make them less appealing to young people

- increased fines for retailers who sell vapes to under-18s

However, the Conservative Tobacco and Vapes Bill had not become law before Parliament was dissolved ahead of the July 2024 general election.

Labour had previously backed the proposals and, once in government, said it would introduce its own **Tobacco and Vapes Bill, external**.

Setting out its policy priorities, in **the King's Speech, in July 2024**, it said the bill would:

- introduce a progressive smoking ban to gradually end the sale of tobacco products across the country
- stop vapes being branded and advertised to appeal to children, regulating the flavours, packaging and display of vapes and other nicotine products
- give Trading Standards more power to prevent under-age sales of tobacco and vapes

Objectives

Our survey aimed to shine a spotlight on awareness and usage, attitudes, why young people vape, access, safety and availability of vapes and how young people see this impacting the environment.

In order to do this, we

- Conducted a survey identifying key themes surrounding e-cigarettes and vaping, with a clear and representative sample across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough among 11-25 year olds.
- Conducted an inclusive face-to-face focus group to allow young people with an opportunity to provide feedback.

Methodology

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough attended regular meetings with our Youthwatch (young volunteers). As part of our research on the topic, we invited the Healthy Schools coordinator to a youth group meeting and asked youth group members to research legislation, market techniques and local and national statistics, as well as local vaping disposal points.

Priorities for this project were established through discussions, and it was felt that a mixed-methods design was most appropriate. Our engagement consisted of two primary methods: a survey with both quantitative and qualitative feedback, plus a focus group.

The survey was designed to collect information on vaping habits, perceptions and experiences, benchmarked against our aims and open for completion between November 2023 and March 2024. The focus group was designed to provide a more in-depth understanding of participant's experiences with vaping, and explore themes that emerged from the survey data.



How we shared this survey

The survey was shared online, using a QR code and email with a link to the survey sent to partners in secondary schools, youth groups, colleges, sixth forms, SEND groups, alternative education providers. Our Youthwatch shared the survey with peers and our Engagement Manager facilitated tutorials and focus groups separately. We would like to thank those schools and colleges for their support.

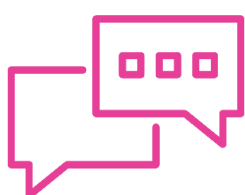


Young persons' feedback: Survey spotlight - Usage and awareness

Of the 728 respondents the majority were between 15-18 years. The range being 11-25 years. Mostly females (421) compared to 244 males. The majority of respondents were white British (558), with a sizeable number from Asian/Asian British communities (70).

In terms of where our respondents lived, the majority came from the Peterborough area (359), with (286) from Cambridgeshire.

For more details of demographics collected please see further down this document.



37% of young
have used
vapes/e-
cigarettes

Most young people used
vapes everyday and on
average 43% take 11 or
more puffs

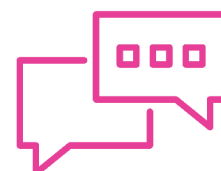
98% who did not vape,
did not smoke either



Only 2% vaped and
smoked, so we
concluded that most
young people
choose to vape only

42% use single
use vapes

66% of young
people had their
first vape between
the age of 13-16
years



Survey spotlight: Access, safety and availability

45% of young people said they would struggle to stop or give up vaping

65% of young people said that single use vapes should be banned



69% of young people said they didn't smoke because they thought it was bad for your health

58% of young people said the reasons they started vaping was due to peer pressure, trendiness and social habit

92% of young People said vaping was harmful to their health

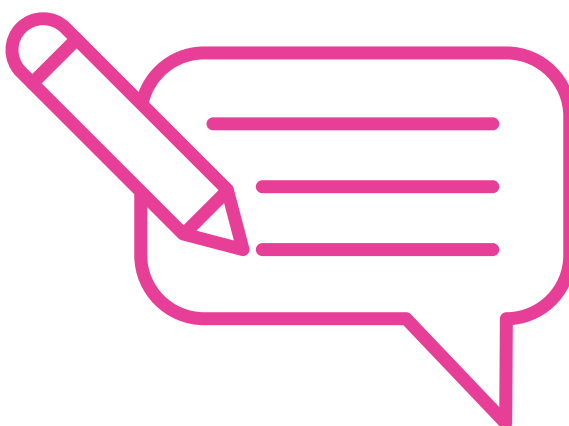


Survey spotlight: Attitudes to environment



72% of young people weren't aware of the recycling points for single use vapes

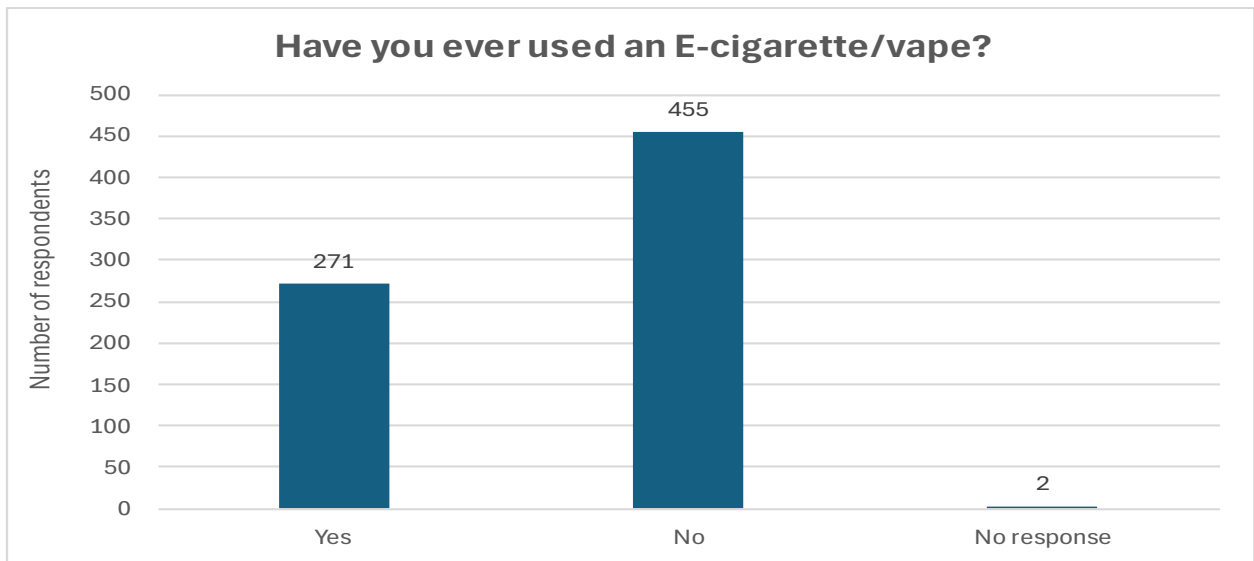
Only 18% were aware of recycling points but didn't use them.



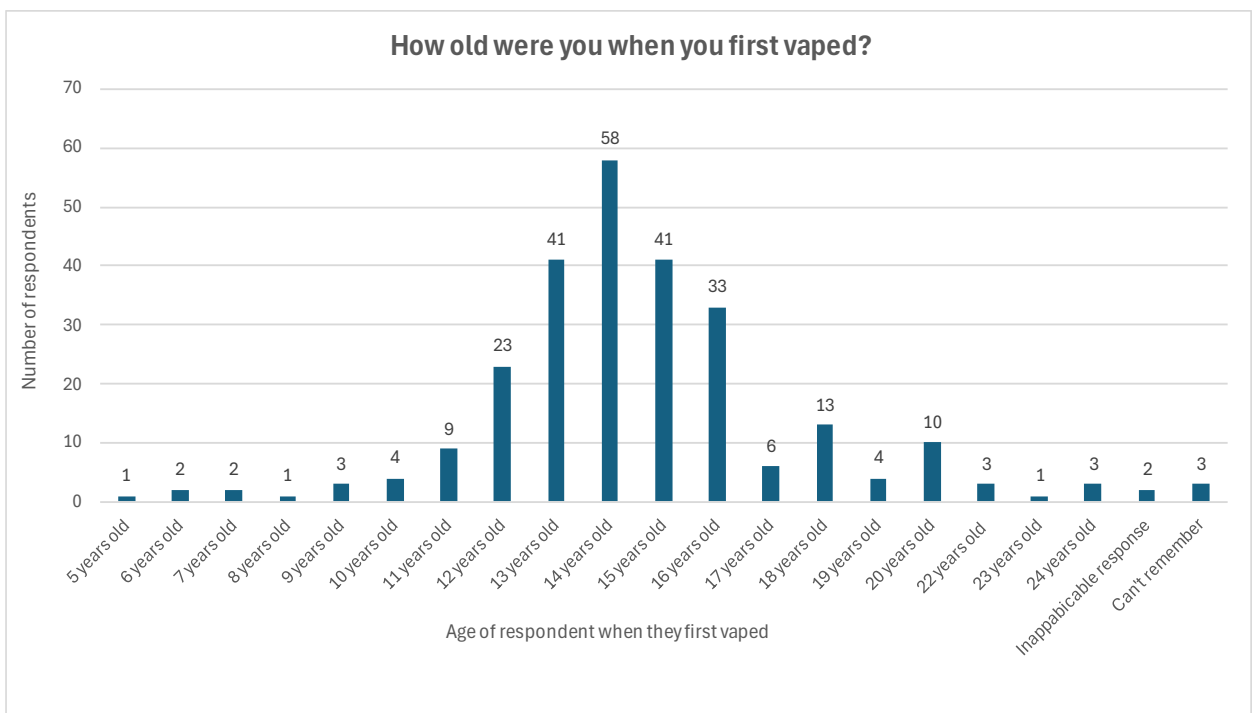
93% said they thought vapes, in particular single use vapes, were harmful to the environment



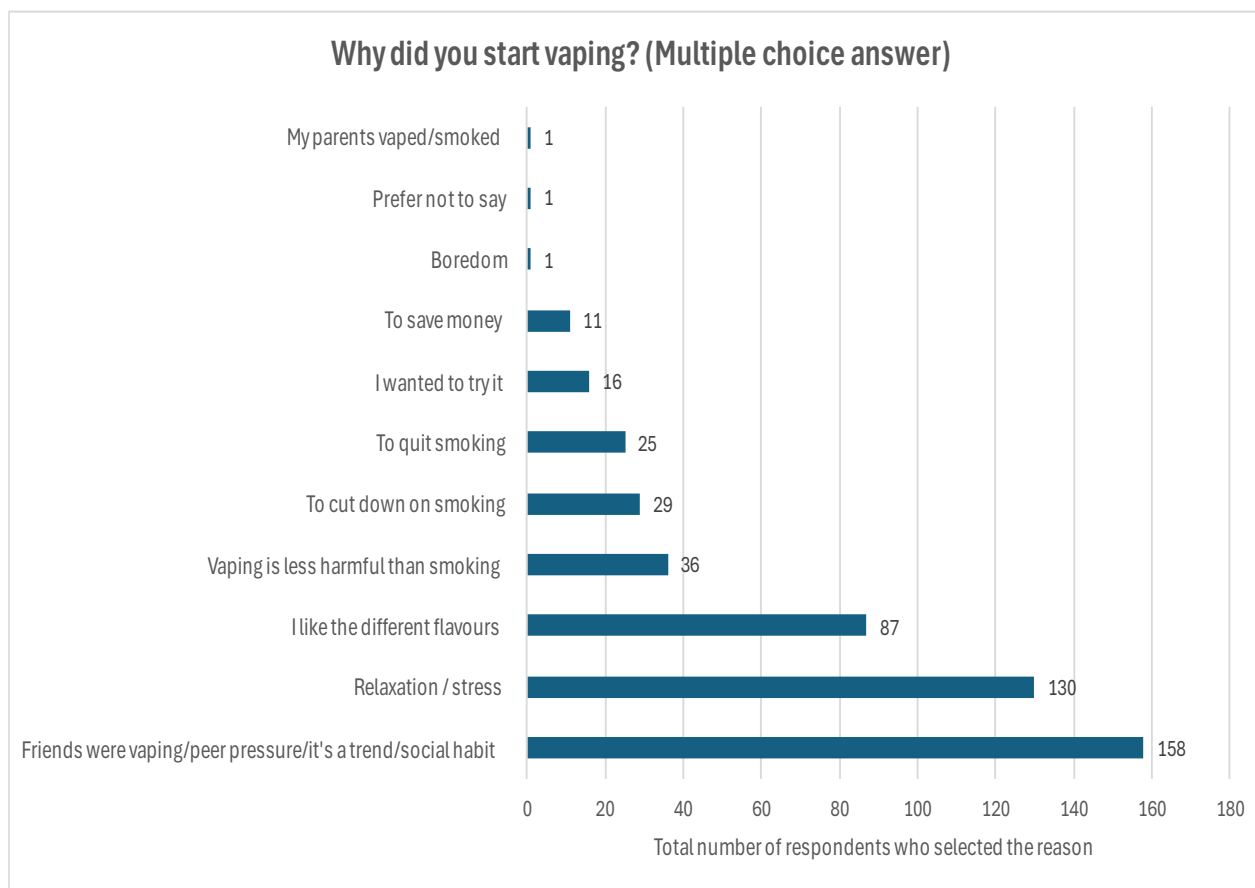
Survey Feedback



Those that said they had never vaped choose not too because of their dislike of smoking and vaping and because of the harmful effects on health and perceived effects of vaping.



Our survey showed that most young people start vaping at the age of 14. However, we know that it can be as young as 5 years old. There appears to be a steep incline at 11-12 years this coincides with starting secondary school. It then decreases sharply at 17 years onwards.



We have observed within the responses that many of the young people gave combined reasons why they vape relating to social habit, relaxation (stress relief) and liking the flavours. See some comments below.



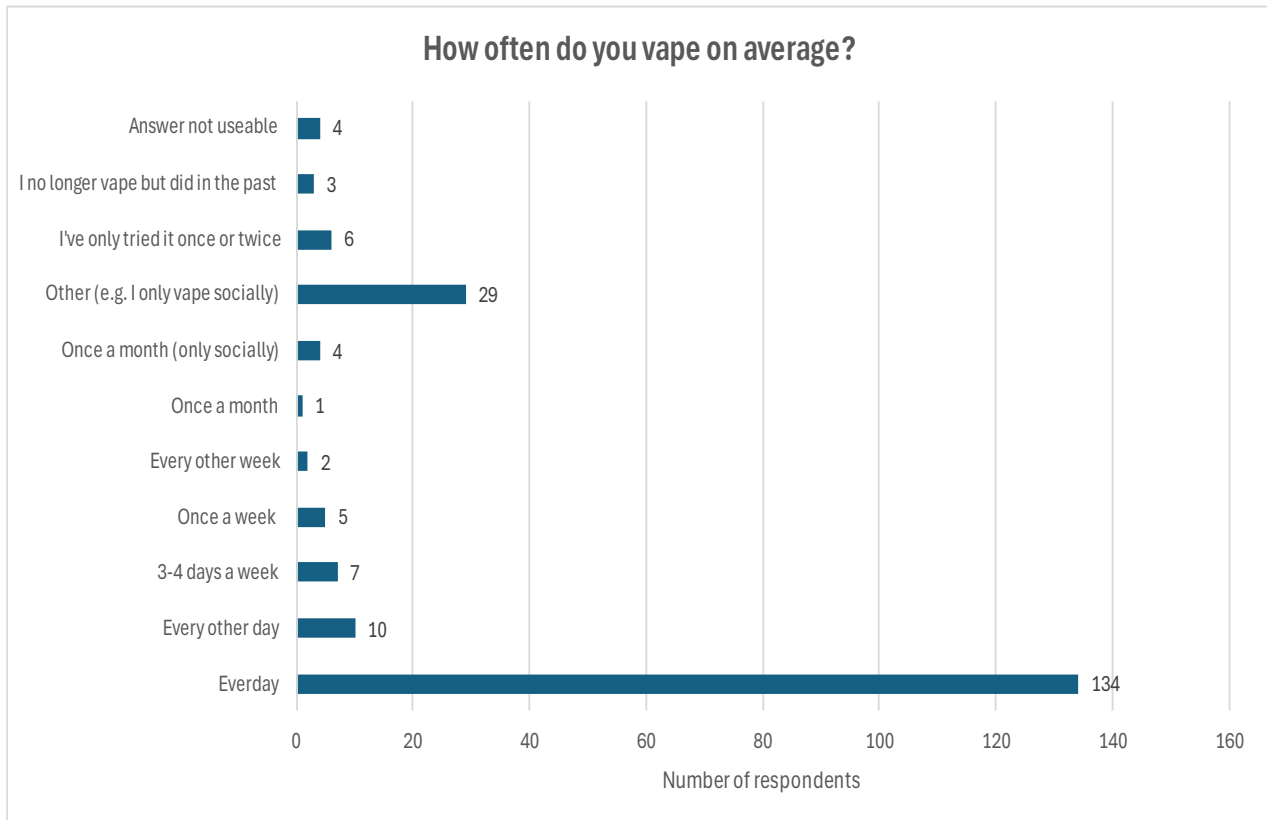
Why did you start vaping?

“A friend forced me to”

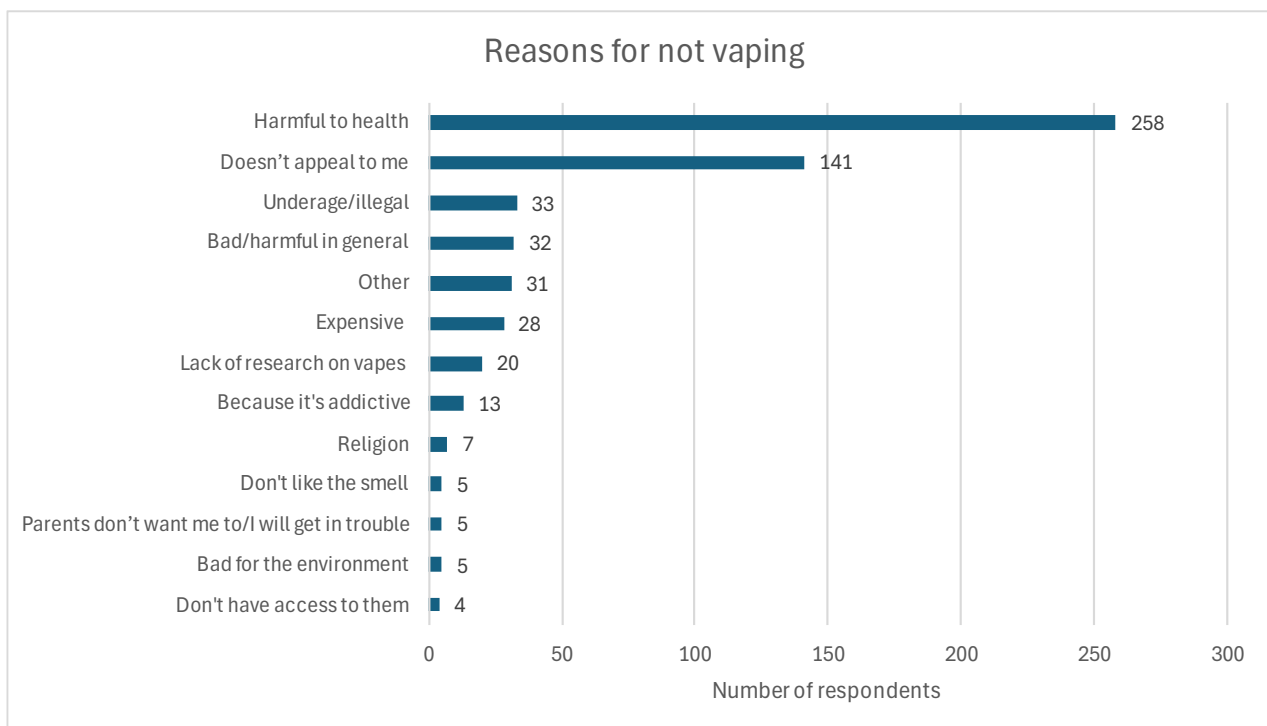
“I wanted to see if it was as good as everyone said”

“I used vaping instead of self-harming. It was not visible”





We know from those young people that do vape, that most are vaping every day.



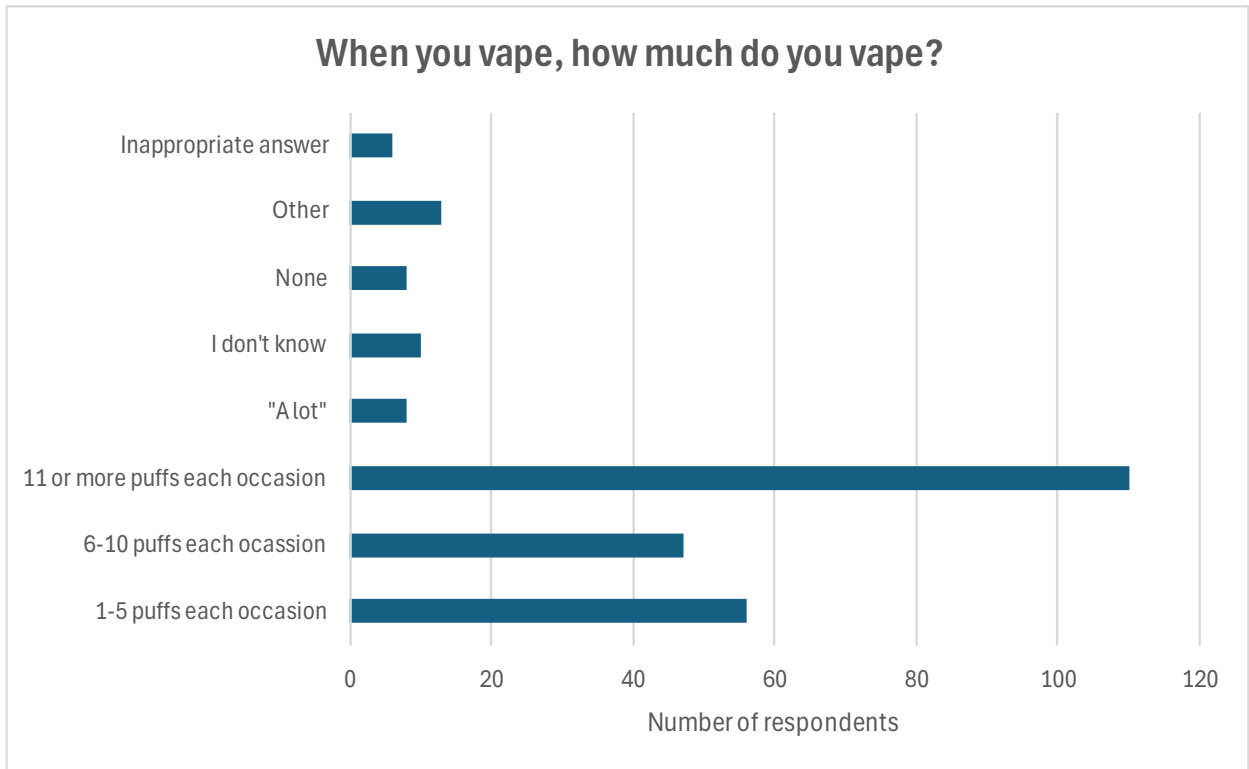
From the responses it appears that health concerns around smoking and vaping are understood, as well as its 'social appeal' and are reasons why many do not choose to vape or smoke. See comments below

Reasons for not vaping:

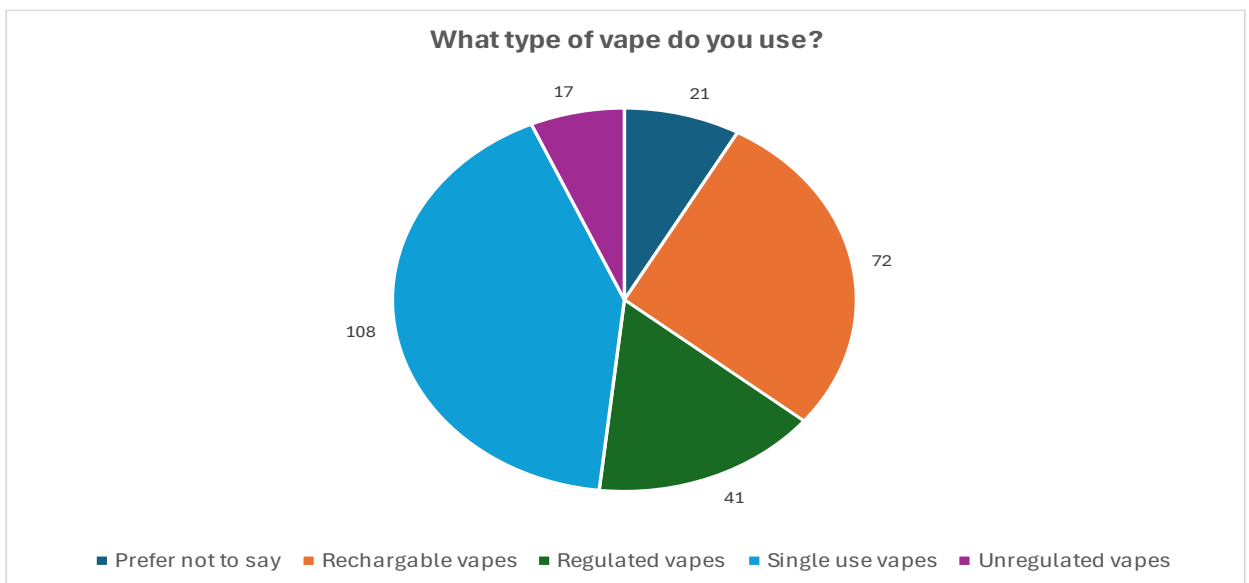
“It’s pointless and harms you, plus I play football and want to succeed”

“I realised it was a source of rebellion and social expectation”

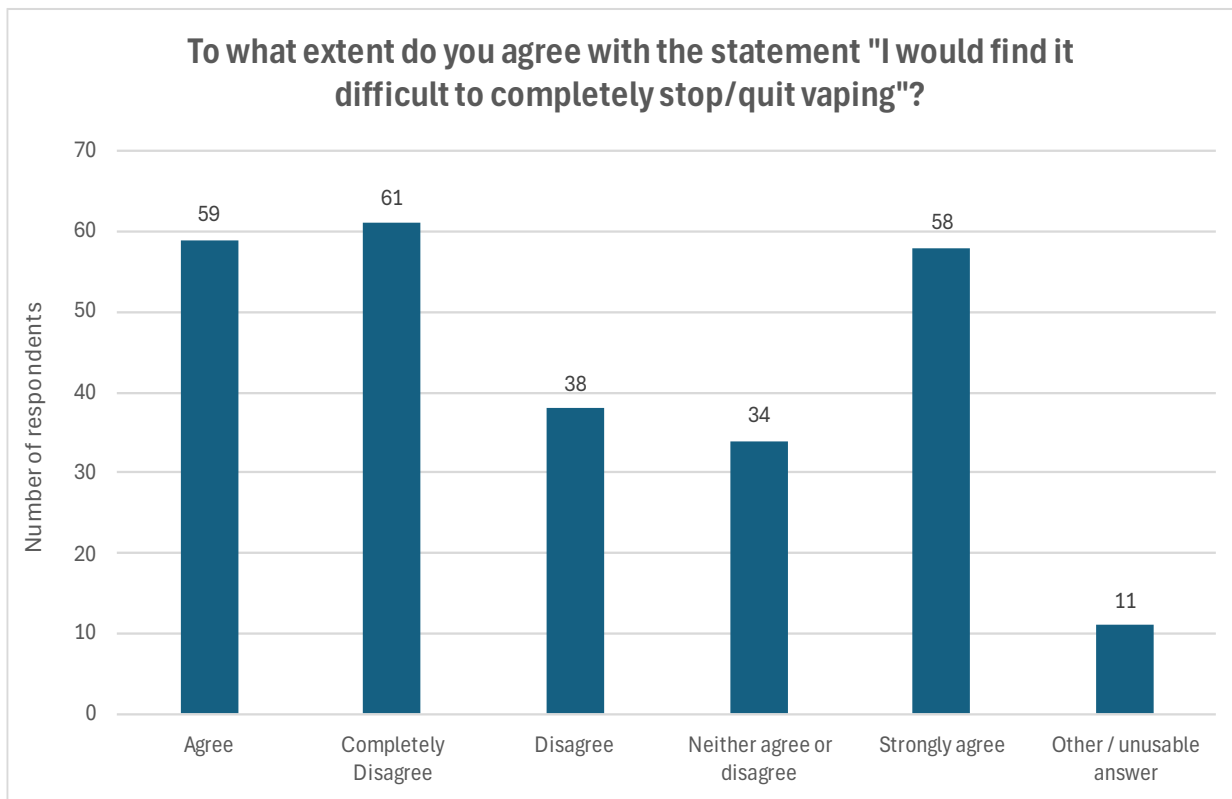
“Barely anything is known about them and the harm the chemicals cause”



We know the majority of people who vape daily do 11 or more puffs on each occasion.



We know that most young people use single use vapes, followed by rechargeable vapes.



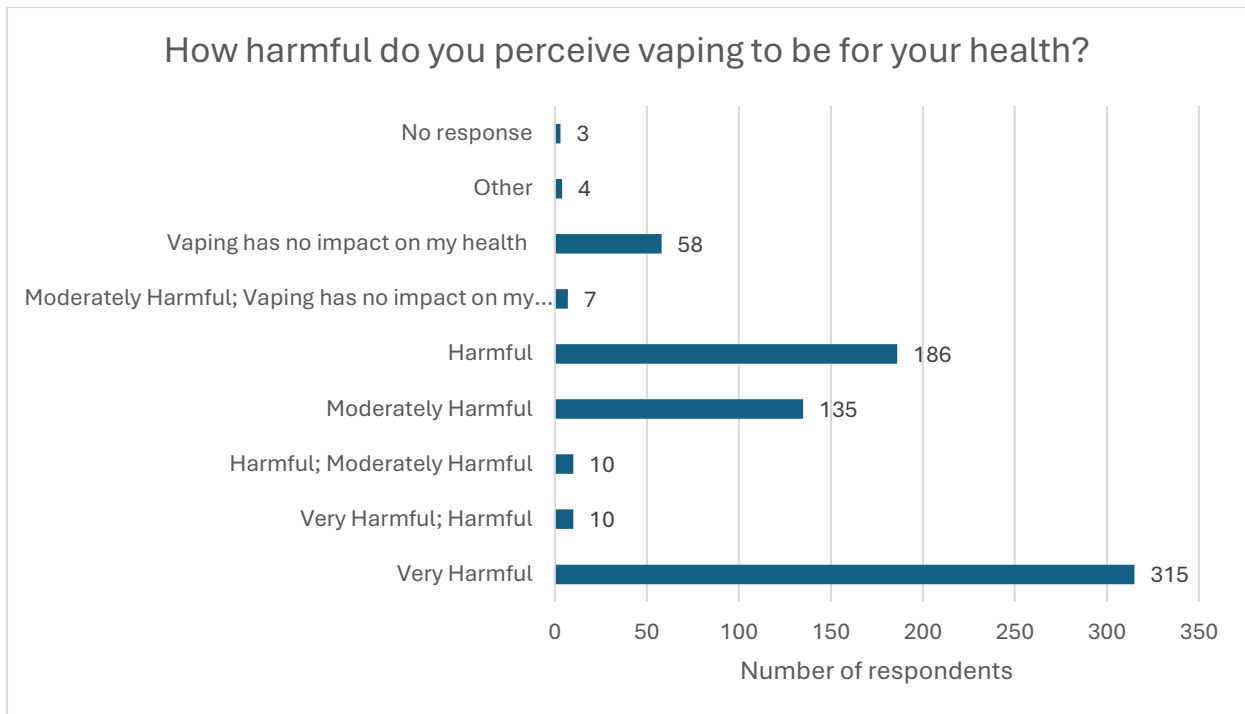
Out of the 271 young people who said they vape.

117 (43.1%) said they would find it difficult to stop vaping. We could conclude this is probably due to the addictive nature of nicotine within vapes.

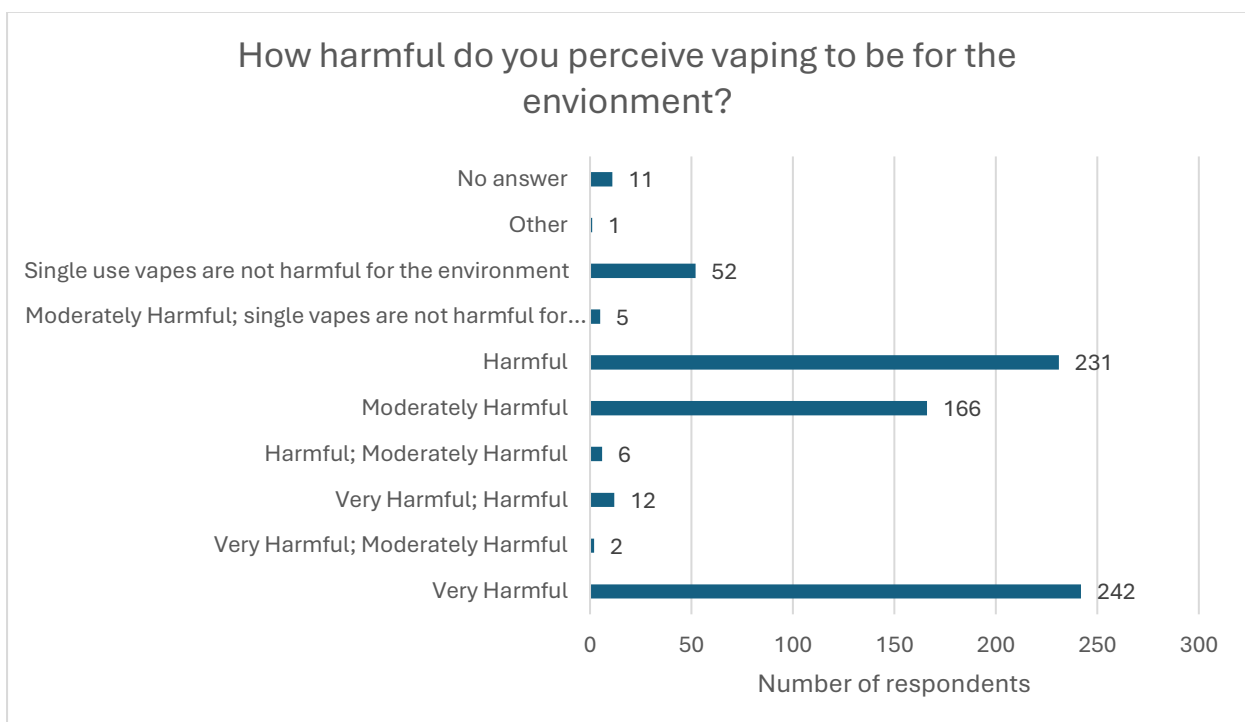
109 (40.2%) said they would find it easy to stop vaping.

34 (12.5) said they would neither agree or disagree with this question.

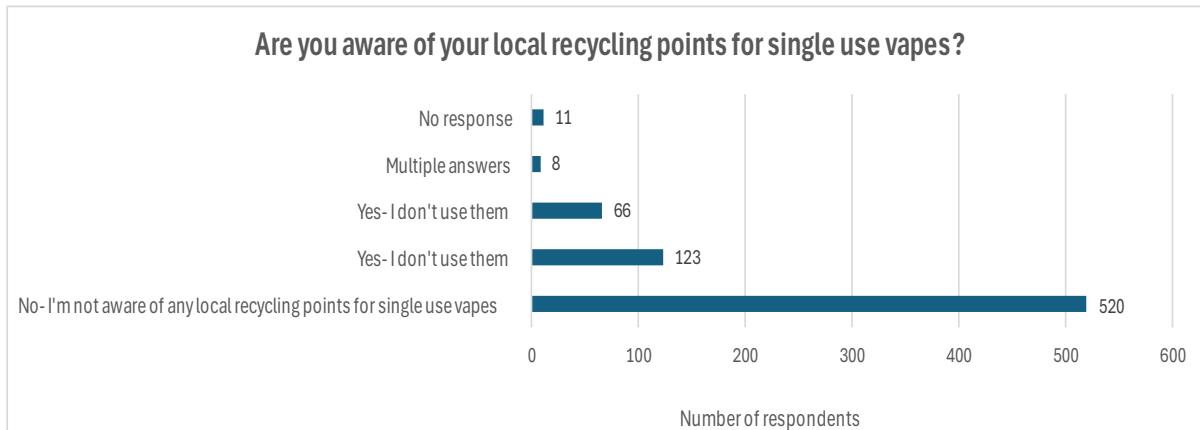
11 (4.2%) did not answer the question.



If you add all the levels of 'harm' perceived in the table above, we could conclude that most young people consider vaping harmful to health. What is of concern is that 58 respondents felt it had no impact on health at all.



Research shows that most single use vapes are often made of plastics that can't be recycled, have hazardous waste within them, which can pollute the environment and are discarded inappropriately i.e. not in recycling units. It is therefore of concern that 52 young people do not perceive vaping to be harmful to the environment.



The graph shows that most young people are not disposing of vapes to recycling points.

How to dispose of vapes responsibly

Our Youthwatch group researched this issue and learned the following:

Vapes, including single-use "disposables", are classed as Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), meaning they should never be thrown away in general waste.

If vapes are put in the bin, the batteries can become damaged, causing fires in refuse vehicles or at waste management sites.

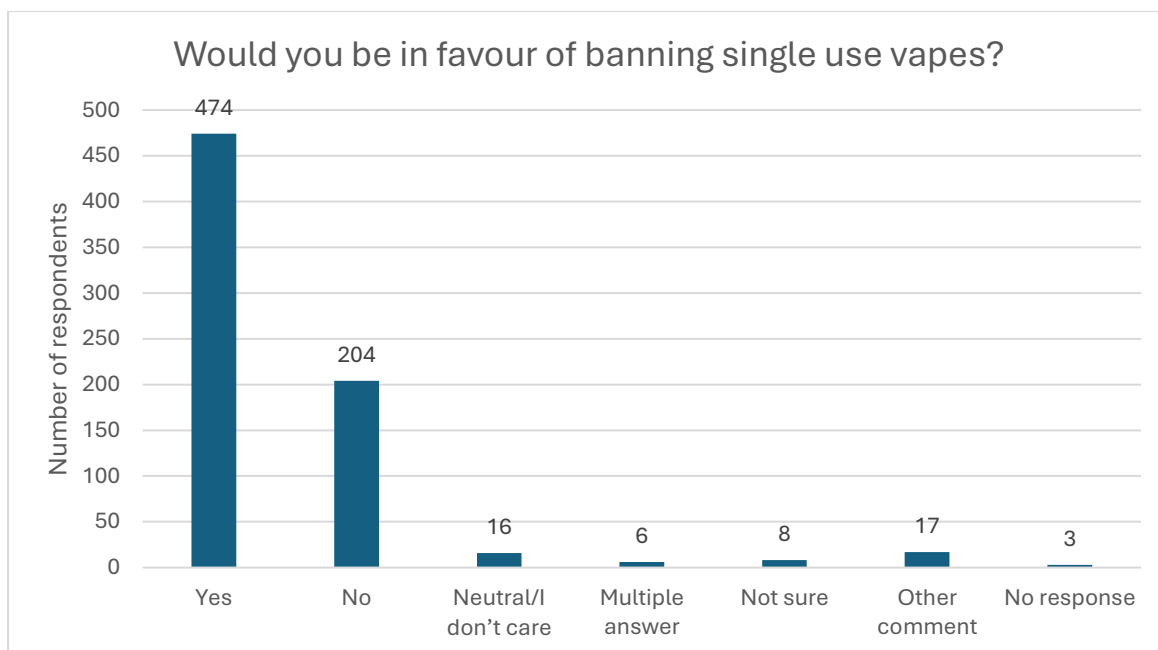
If discarded outdoors, over time they break down, releasing heavy metals and other pollutants into the environment. Greenpeace state we bin nearly 5 million vapes each week in the UK.

You can take vapes for recycling to the shop where you buy your replacements or to your local authority household waste recycling centre.

Additional collection points are being added all the time, you can use your postcode to [Recycle vapes - Find a local recycling point](#).

[Vaping to quit smoking - Better Health - NHS](#)





The majority of young people said they would be in favour of banning single use vapes.

Of those that said they didn't think they should be banned one person said "I don't think they should be banned as they help people stop smoking"

455 young people said they did not vape, of the 455 respondents only 2 people smoked tobacco products, 5 did not respond and 450 people said they did not smoke.



Most young people stated they do not smoke because it is bad for your health. See comments below.

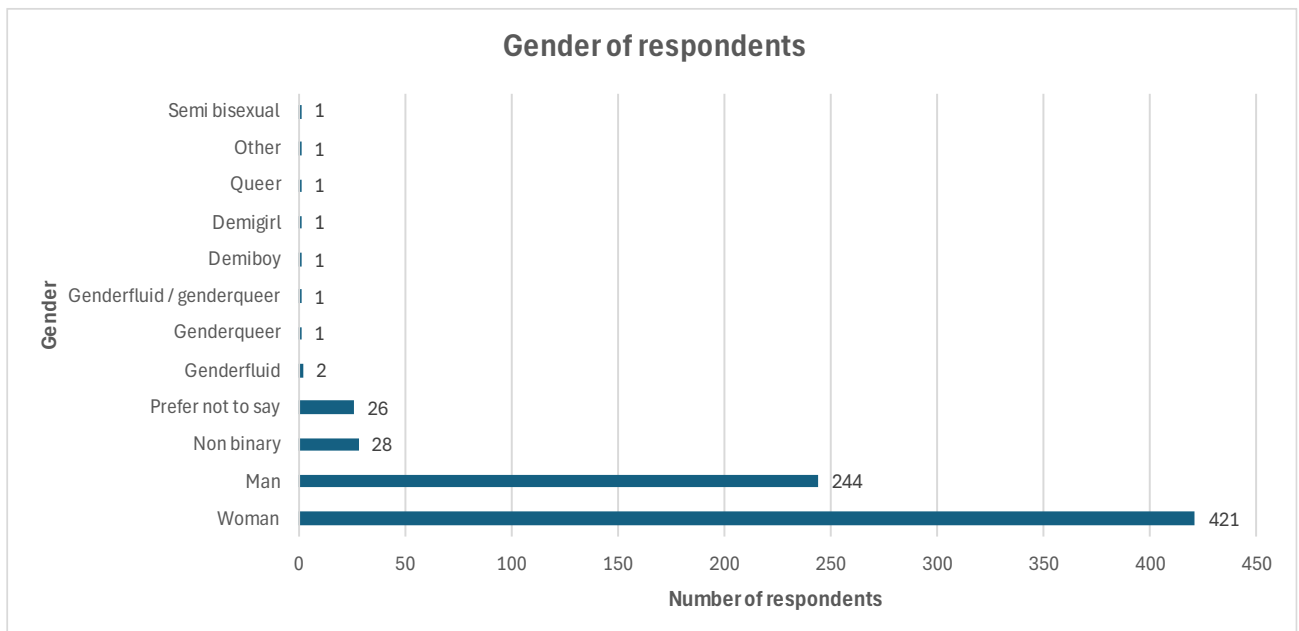
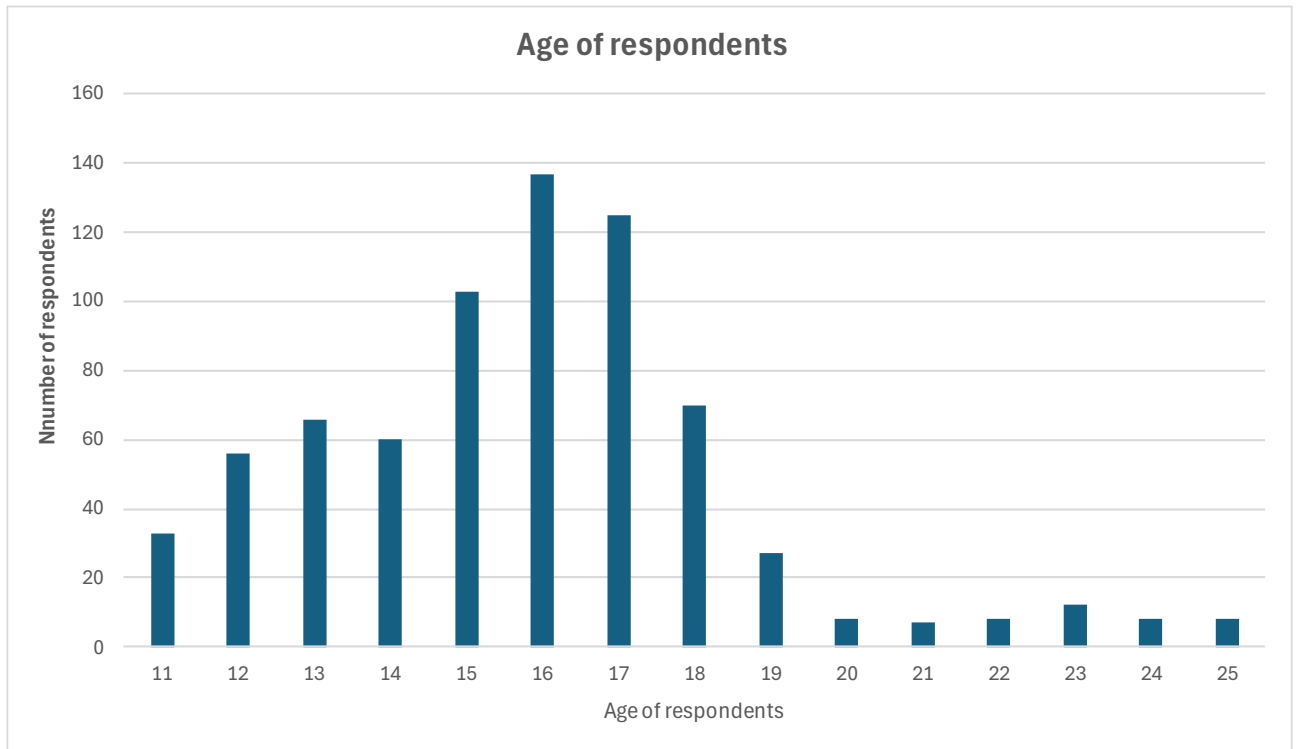
Why do you choose not to smoke?

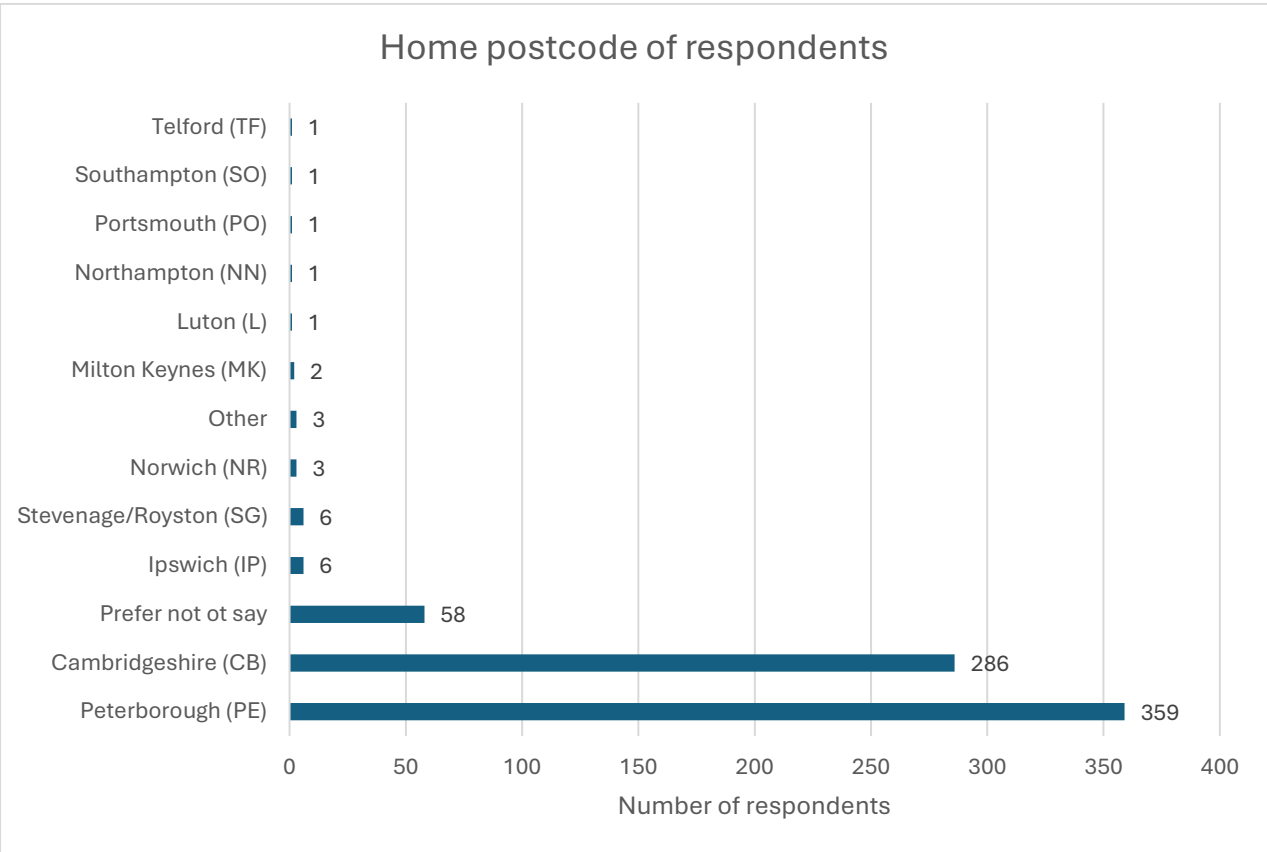
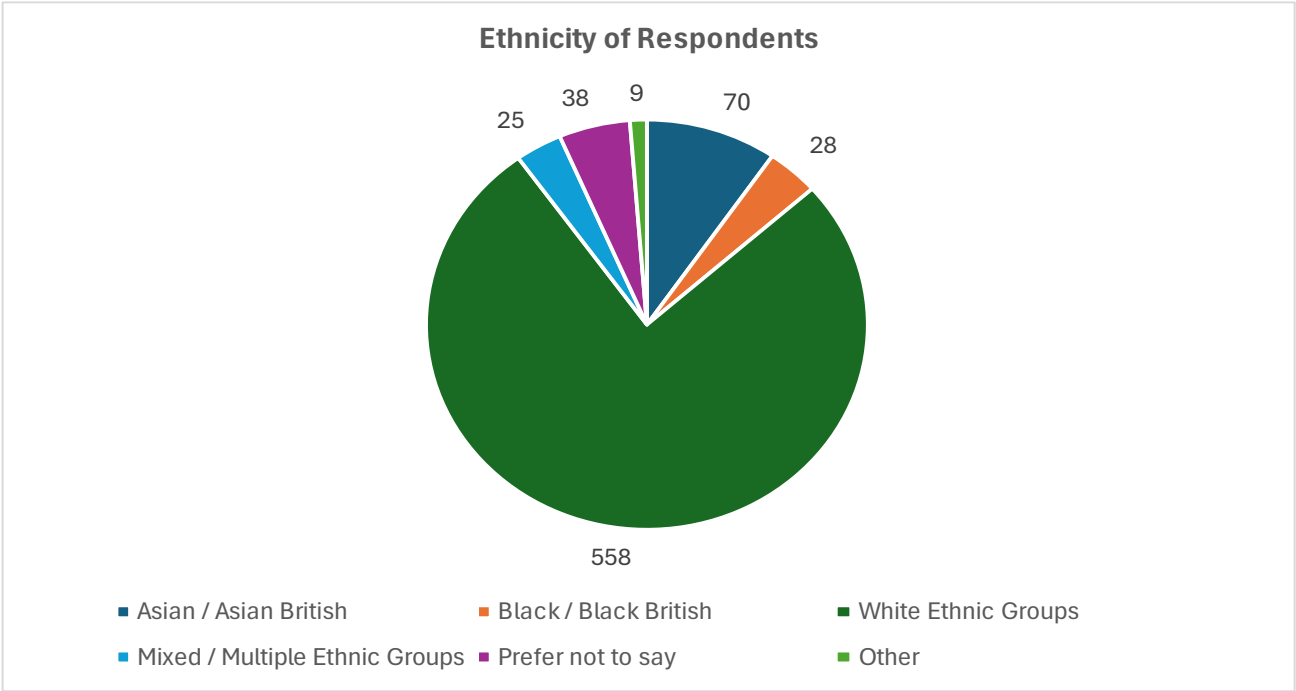
“I have health problems (Asthma)”

“I have seen health issues and deaths in my family that relate to smoking”

The following data gives full details of the demographics collected

Young persons' demographics





A Focus Group

Children & Young People Focus Group feedback

In June 2024, we spoke to 8 young people aged 13-17 years, of mixed nationalities. (2 x Asian, 1 Eastern European, 5 white British). The focus group was part of the Student Voice Celebration Day facilitated by Jessi Wilson from the Unloc Youth Organisation. The young people were from a range of secondary schools and colleges across Cambridgeshire. All were non-smokers and non-vapers. This may have affected the comments made in the group.



From the outset, we explained that the information they shared would contribute to our recent vaping survey with young people. Consent from the young people had been given to Unloc, the organisation who planned the event. We explained their feedback would be anonymous.

We began by giving a brief overview of the government ban on vaping, announced in January 2024, and how the imminent general election may affect some of the changes due to happen at the end of the year.

Some of the changes already in place are:

- To stop use of flavours.
- To make plain packaging a requirement.
- To keep vapes concealed in shops and not displayed near sweets.
- To impose fines of up to £2,500 for shopkeepers in breach.

The group were shocked to find out that one vape delivers 600 puffs. This is equivalent to smoking two packs of cigarettes.

We then asked the group to focus on the following questions:

What do you think influences vaping behaviours?

The group identified the following as contributing factors that influence young people when starting to vape:



How harmful do you think single use vapes are for the environment?

The group made the following comments:

In some parts of Cambridgeshire you have separate waste bags to put batteries in.

People who vape dont care about the environment

No-one recycles

They should not be put in normal bins as dangerous

People leave them on the paths and public areas

Is vaping safer than smoking cigarettes/tobacco?

The group made the following points:

- Everyone in the focus group said **NO** it's not safer.
- They said, the only reason people should vape is if they want to stop/cut down smoking.
- Vapes should only be prescribed by the NHS for this purpose.
- That vaping is a steppingstone to smoking.

How harmful do you perceive vaping is on your lifestyle?

The group made the following comments:

- Vaping would be a drain on finances.
- Vaping would be very bad for your health.
- Breathing in other people's smoke could be harmful.
- Media portray vaping as better for your health than smoking.
- People who vape don't always respect other people's views, around passive 'vaping/smoking' especially those that don't vape.
- Vaping can be addictive.
- It can be dangerous, as batteries in vapes have the potential to explode.
- Vaping is trendy.
- People who vape are often rebelling against parents and rules.

What recommendations would you make?

The focus group concluded their discussion with the following recommendations they would like to see implemented:

- A limit to where vapes are sold.
- A ban on illegal sales, (black market), that are not regulated including online sales
- Vapes to be only used as a medical way to reduce smoking. This would control the age of sales.
- A limit to vaping in public areas, similar to smoking regulation areas.
- Vaping to only be permitted in your private property.
- A ban on specialist vaping shops.
- A ban on advertising of vapes.
- Those who smoke/vape should wait longer for hospital treatment for smoking related illnesses.
- Prices of vapes to be increased.
- A limit on the amount of 'puffs' available in a vape, to increase the overall cost of vaping as a preventative measure.
- Health warnings on vape packaging.

NO SMOKING
 **OR** 
VAPING

Conclusions:

- It is clear from feedback, from young people in our study and others that the prevalence of vaping has increased in young people, with the majority of young people having not smoked cigarettes prior to vaping.
- Of those that do vape, the majority do not use vaping to prevent themselves from smoking cigarettes.
- Young people typically vape daily.
- Single use/disposable vapes are the most common type of vapes used by the young people surveyed.
- Overall, young people's understanding of nicotine and the effect it has on the body appears to be reasonable. With young people saying nicotine is addictive and makes it difficult to give up.
- Their understanding on the environmental impact is less understood.
- We saw a steep increase in vaping at the start of secondary school.
- The most common reason given for vaping was to relieve stress and improve mental health, followed by comments around social pressures such as vaping 'to look cool' and peer pressure.
- The primary reason given for not vaping was due to this being perceived as being unhealthy and bad for you.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the data collected and the responses provided, the young people put forward the following recommendations.

1. They recommend preventative initiatives are introduced for 11–12 year-olds (Year 7 & 8). This would link into our finding that the majority try vaping at ages 13-16.
2. They recommend and will support the launch of localised public education campaigns in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, focusing on the unknown health risks of vaping. This should target young people in an attempt to address the social acceptance of vaping and the perceived view in young people that it is fashionable. Its linked to a social habit and peer pressure.
3. They recommend education for young people to take place within a school or college setting, specifying within PSHE lessons. As well as delivering this education to primary school aged children (particularly

in the last year of primary education) as a preventative measure, to stop the steep rise in vaping take up as young people start secondary school.

4. They recommend schools utilise existing resources and organisations such as information packs, online materials and videos within the curriculum. And possibly from external professionals, such as those working in the NHS, to deliver this education.
5. They will support initiatives that provide local health care providers with resources and training on how to discuss vaping and its risks with younger patients, as well as guiding them on appropriate referral options for further support.
6. In order to address adolescents who already vape, they recommend cessation support should be introduced, targeted towards young people. Consider peer cessation advisors, linking to health risks, mental health and environmental impact. (A Stop Smoking & Vaping Practitioner role is being piloted in Cambridgeshire until 31/03/2025 working with 12-18 year olds).
7. They would like to see more education around the difficulty in recycling single use vapes and promotion of recycling points for rechargeable vapes. Most young people were not aware of recycling points and the difficulty of recycling single use vapes.
8. They recommend and support raising awareness of young people's usages and the link to poor mental health and its use to relax and reduce stress. They will support campaigns that increase public awareness of the links between vaping and mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and depression. They will support any local initiatives that introduce quit lines on apps or mental health websites such as Keep Your Head.
9. They recommend Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough provide links to these service/resources on our websites.
10. They recognise some young people want to vape and don't want to give up.

National issues

1. The aforementioned legislation being introduced by the government to address these issues should decrease the volume of young people vaping however, it is imperative that these laws should be implemented soon in order to prevent additional adolescents and children from beginning to vape.
2. A collaborative, non-judgmental approach between government, schools, and health services is essential to help those who are already addicted to nicotine. More funding to existing schools programmes to support this.
3. Impose heavier fines for those retailers or sites selling vapes to under-age people.
4. Increase the cost of vapes to reduce young people buying them.

NEXT STEPS

The report will be shared with all the stakeholders involved in sharing this survey for us including:

- Healthwatch England
- Local Schools and Colleges
- Sheffield Hallam University researchers
- Youth groups
- Healthy Schools
- Peterborough City Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Council Public Health Teams
- Cambridge and Peterborough Integrated Care Board
- Health and Wellbeing Boards for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The report will also be placed on our Healthwatch Websites.



Four members of our Youthwatch group pictured above

Youthwatch members involved who have contributed to the project are:

Chelsia Lake
Johnny Hebron
Molly Hopgood
Eva Woods
Atasha Iriola

Lara Moussa
Pheobe Payne
Karina Shah
Danielle Daboh
Lucy Shaw-Loan

Zia Ratnasothy
Chloe Ting
Daniel Kan
Reya Neckebroek
Samiksha Gopinath-Prabavathi

APPENDICES

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill: What you need to know

[The Tobacco and Vapes Bill: What you need to know – Department of Health and Social Care Media Centre](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would like to say a huge **thank you** to all the young people who chose to take part in our survey and focus groups. We are incredibly grateful to all the organisations for their assistance and for helping to make this possible.

Cathy Murphy, Cambridgeshire County Council & Jo Howling, Healthy Schools for the use of data from The Health Behaviour Survey and Catch You Breath Programme.

Jessi Wilson, Unloc Youth Organisation for welcoming us as part of the Student Voice Celebration Day.

Healthwatch Blackpool for coming along to our youthwatch meeting to showcase their vaping project and offer advice.

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