

Vaping – Youth perceptions and attitudes: evidence briefing

Introduction

This briefing presents our understanding of youth perceptions of and attitudes towards vaping based on a review of the existing literature.

Background

Over the past few years, vaping prevalence among the youngest age groups has shown an upward trend¹. This has raised concerns around the potential of vaping to renormalise tobacco smoking and serve as a gateway to it. Understanding youth perceptions and attitudes is key in minimising this risk.

Methodology

This evidence briefing is based on a search and analysis of scholarly research on youth perceptions of and attitudes towards vaping, and how they compare with perceptions of and attitudes towards conventional cigarette smoking. The search was carried out between February 2023 and January 2024.

The search was conducted on a number of search engines: KandE (a Scottish Government resource covering several databases), Google Scholar, PubMed and ScienceDirect. It included the following terms: “ENDS”, “e-cigarettes”, “vapes”, “vaping”, “youth”, “young people”, “adolescents”, “teenagers”, “children”, “perceptions”, “attitudes”, “views”.

Research conducted in countries culturally comparable to the UK (e.g. USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, European countries) has been included despite variations in policy approaches to vaping products. Priority has been given to studies involving young people under the age of 18. However, a few studies with

¹ [Health Behaviour in School-aged Children \(HBSC\) Scotland 2022](#); [Use of e-cigarettes among young people in Great Britain - ASH](#).

participants above this age range have been incorporated when they provided relevant findings. The search has been narrowed to studies published after 2018 to account for changes in perceptions and attitudes following the introduction on the market of the latest generations of vaping products, such as pod-based and disposable vapes.

The majority of the studies included in this briefing are qualitative. Although qualitative research can provide valuable insights into personal perspectives and lived experiences, it also has inherent limitations such as risk of bias and small sample sizes which limit the generalisability of findings. These limitations have been considered when reporting findings.

A total of 33 papers were selected and reviewed, with the exclusion of opinion pieces and editorials. Of these, 10 were systematic reviews and/or meta-ethnographies, serving as the main sources for this briefing. Additionally, 23 primary studies have been incorporated to supplement these.

In this briefing we make reference to “vaping products” to describe both nicotine and non-nicotine devices used to inhale an aerosol. The sources analysed here adopt different terms and definitions. For accuracy and to preserve the original meaning, the terminology chosen by the authors of each review has been retained when summarising their findings.

Key findings

The meta-ethnographies, systematic reviews and primary studies examined for this briefing highlight that perceptions among young people are varied (e.g. depending on user status – current, ever or non-vaper), dynamic and sometimes contradictory. Findings have been grouped into three overarching themes.

Attractiveness – The research indicates that young people find vaping attractive due to:

- design of vaping products (e.g. small size and possibility to customise them, for example by choosing a variety of flavours and nicotine contents) and lack of unpleasant smell compared to conventional cigarettes, which make them easy to conceal from disapproving authoritative figures such as parents or teachers;
- the availability of a variety of flavours, cited as the second most common reason (after curiosity) for increased willingness to try/continue vaping;
- brightly coloured packaging and appealing names; and
- easy accessibility in terms of cost and purchasing options (i.e. from multiple illegal sources, including physical stores, online or through proxies).

Risk perception – Evidence around youth considerations on vaping health harms are mixed, often due to what is perceived as a lack of research and a lack of consensus within public health. Young people:

- are concerned about the unknown long-term risks of vaping and second-hand vapour/aerosol (SHV/A);
- believe that flavoured vaping products are less harmful than unflavoured or tobacco-flavoured ones;
- think that vaping is safer compared to tobacco smoking (although the evidence suggests the proportion of those who do is gradually decreasing);
- believe that vaping is less addictive than smoking, although the majority of young vapers consider themselves addicted or describe their urge to smoke as moderate to strong (with research showing this might be due, in part, to the lack of natural “end point” of vaping products compared to conventional cigarettes which burn to their end); and
- are influenced by the nature of the packaging, with a systematic review concluding that warning labels are associated with increased harm perception, but more recent primary studies suggesting these do not have an impact; and one experimental study suggesting that plain packaging might be associated with higher risk perception, hence might diminish the appeal of vaping.

Acceptability – The research indicates that young people find vaping socially acceptable. This is because young people:

- experience an increased exposure to vaping due to a lack of restrictions and have a perception of high vaping prevalence, which contribute towards a normalisation of vaping and indirect peer pressure to partake in vaping;
- are influenced by family and peers in their behaviours and beliefs of vaping, namely are more likely to vape if the people around them have positive attitudes towards vaping;
- tend to see vaping as a social activity if current/ever vapers, but consider vaping as just a trend if never vapers;
- generally approve of vaping products when used socially or for cessation purposes, but disapprove of regular use;
- recognise the environmental impact of plastic/batteries contained in vaping products, although they believe SHV/A is better for the environment than tobacco smoke; and
- consider vaping as a coping mechanism to control stress or anxiety.

Policy implications

The Scottish Government’s position is that vaping products should never be used by children, young people and non-smokers. Given upward trends in youth vaping prevalence, the health harms caused by vaping in non-smokers and the risk that vaping may act as a gateway to smoking, we have reviewed existing research on young people’s perceptions and attitudes to inform our policy approach.

Perceptions of and attitudes towards vaping products have varied over time and will likely vary in the future. We will continue to review emerging evidence to address issues around vaping attractiveness and social norms in line with our wider public health ambition outlined in the [Tobacco and Vaping Framework](#).

Annex – Analysis of the existing evidence

Attractiveness

Several systematic reviews/meta-ethnographies and primary studies examined for this briefing suggest that young people find vaping attractive due to vaping products' design (e.g. small size and possibility to customise them, for example by choosing different nicotine contents); enjoyment in experimenting with a variety of flavours; exposure to brightly coloured packaging; and easy accessibility of vaping products in terms of cost and purchasing options (i.e. from multiple illegal sources, including physical stores, online or through proxies). More details on each of these aspects are presented below.

Product design

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that young people tend to perceive vaping products as appealing due to their novel design and function, customisability in terms of flavours and nicotine contents, small size and lack of unpleasant smell compared to conventional cigarettes.

- A [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults' experiences and perceptions of e-cigarette use (2021) concluded that e-cigarettes were viewed as youth-oriented in design and function, and as reflecting the younger generation's **relationship with technology**. A more recent [Scottish focus group study](#) (2023) also supports these findings.
- A [systemic review](#) on consumer preference for e-cigarette attributes (2019) and a [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults' perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use (2021) concluded that young people were drawn to the **customisability** of vaping products, namely the possibility of choosing a variety of flavours and nicotine contents.
- Two meta-ethnographies on [emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents](#) (2021) and on [young adults' experiences and perceptions of e-cigarette use](#) (2021) concluded that youths perceived vaping products as **more appealing than conventional cigarettes** due to their customisable characteristics (e.g. possibility to mix e-liquids) and variety of flavours. Additionally, young people were attracted to their discrete size and lack of unpleasant smell, which make them easy to conceal from disapproving authoritative figures such as parents or teachers. These findings are supported by a more recent [US study](#) on adolescent vaping experiences (2023).

Flavours

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that flavours increase willingness to try/continue vaping, due to the enjoyment in experimenting with different flavours and the sensory appeal of flavours both in terms of taste, and appeal of names and designs.

- Three systematic reviews on [young people's consumer preferences for e-cigarettes attributes](#) (2018), [youth perceptions and use of non-menthol flavours in e-cigarettes](#) (2019) and [youth use of e-liquid flavours](#) (2022), and a number of more recent primary research studies², found that flavours (especially fruit or sweet flavours) increased product appeal, and willingness to initiate vaping and use vaping products. Flavours were cited by young people as the **second most common reason** (after curiosity) encouraging them to try vaping in a number of papers³.
- A systematic review on [youth use of e-liquid flavours](#) (2022) concluded that **young people found enjoyment in experimenting with new flavours** and preferred to switch between different flavours rather than sticking to a single one. A more recent [Scottish focus group study](#) (2023) concurs that the variety of flavours available plays an important role in attracting the youths.
- A systematic review on [youth use of e-liquid flavours](#) (2022) concluded that **the sensory appeal of vaping flavours may extend beyond taste** and include additional aesthetic elements, such as distinct flavour names and descriptions, packaging colours and designs.

Packaging

The sources examined for this briefing highlight mixed findings on whether young people notice vaping products' packaging, with the most recent evidence revealing that youths feel constantly exposed to bright and colourful packaging, would find plain packaging unattractive and believe products labelled as "tobacco-free nicotine" to be safer and less addictive.

- There is **mixed evidence on the extent to which youths notice vaping products' packaging**. A [UK qualitative study](#) on e-cigarette emergence and the potential for renormalisation of smoking (2020), and a [GB mixed-method study](#) on young people's use of e-cigarettes (2020) concluded that adolescents were not always exposed, hence influenced by packaging. This was because vaping devices were often passed between peers in social gatherings or obtained through informal supply chains. However, a more recent qualitative study by [Cancer Research UK](#) (2023) reported that youths noted the high visibility of e-cigarette packaging throughout daily life (e.g. in shops, schools, online and as litter on the street) and were able to name different brands. Participants also mentioned their attraction to the brightly coloured packaging, which was often positioned in contrast with the regulated, plain packaging and limited visibility of conventional cigarettes.

² Findings on the appeal of fruit and sweet flavours are supported by the following more recent primary studies: [Use of vapes among young people in Great Britain](#); [Vaping Flavors and Flavor Representation: A Test of Youth Risk Perceptions, Novelty Perceptions, and Susceptibility](#); [Youth's engagement and perceptions of disposable e-cigarettes: a UK focus group study](#).

³ See: [A systematic review of consumer preference for e-cigarette attributes: Flavor, nicotine strength, and type](#); [Impact of non-menthol flavours in e-cigarettes on perceptions and use: an updated systematic review](#); [E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General](#); [A Review of the Use and Appeal of Flavored Electronic Cigarettes](#).

- Findings from an [international randomised online experiment](#) (2023) and a [GB experimental study](#) (2023) revealed that **plain packaging might diminish the appeal of vaping products**. The [international randomised online experiment](#) further suggested that plain packaging might be associated with higher health risk perceptions. A qualitative study by [Cancer Research UK](#) (2023) also found that plain packaging was perceived as particularly unattractive, while brightly coloured packaging contributed to youth perception that vaping products were less harmful than conventional cigarettes.
- A [US experimental study](#) on vaping products and labelling (2023), found that **labels' wording can cause confusion** on health harms of vaping. The authors reported that youth exposed to flavoured disposable nicotine vaping products labelled as “tobacco-free nicotine” was more likely to believe that the devices did not contain nicotine, and were less addictive and safer compared to products with “nicotine” or “nicotine from tobacco” labels.

Accessibility

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that young people find vaping attractive as vaping products are relatively cheap, especially when compared to tobacco products, and easy to obtain.

- A [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults' e-cigarette perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use (2021) and the [Surgeon General Report](#) (2016) concluded that young people **perceived vaping products as cheap**, particularly in relation to conventional cigarettes. Two more recent primary studies, a [qualitative study](#) conducted by Cancer Research UK (2023) and a [Scottish focus group study](#) (2023), also found that low price of vaping products was part of their appeal, especially with regard to disposables.
- A number of meta-ethnographies/systematic reviews and primary studies reported that young people found vaping products **easy to obtain**, both online and in physical stores (from retailers who would sell to underage customers) and/or through proxies such as family members, friends or strangers⁴.

⁴ See: [Youth who use e-cigarettes regularly: A qualitative study of behavior, attitudes, and familial norms](#); [Adolescents Who Vape Nicotine and Their Experiences Vaping: A Qualitative Study](#); [“If Someone Has It, I’m Gonna Hit It”: Lessons Learned From Minnesota Teens About Vaping](#); [Young people's use of e-cigarettes in Wales, England and Scotland before and after introduction of EU Tobacco Products Directive regulations: a mixed-method natural experimental evaluation](#); [“That's the whole thing about vaping, it's custom tasty goodness”: a meta-ethnography of young adults' perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use](#); [The emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents: A meta-ethnography of qualitative evidence](#); [Youth's engagement and perceptions of disposable e-cigarettes: a UK focus group study](#); [Adolescent Use and Perceptions of JUUL and Other Pod-Style e-Cigarettes: A Qualitative Study to Inform Prevention](#); [E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General](#).

Risk perception

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses examined for this briefing reveal how young people's risk perception of vaping is influenced by beliefs in absolute harm (e.g. long-term harms), addictive nature of vaping products, relative harm compared to conventional cigarettes; and by the warning labels on packaging. More details on each of these aspects are presented below.

Absolute harm

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that there are diverse perceptions on the absolute harm of vaping coming from mixed and false information. Young people are concerned about the unknown long-term risks of vaping and second-hand vapour/aerosol (SHV/A), and believe that flavoured vaping products are less harmful than unflavoured or tobacco-flavoured ones.

- A [systematic review](#) on adolescents' health perceptions of e-cigarettes (2021) and two meta-ethnographies on [emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents](#) (2021) and on [young adults' e-cigarette perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use](#) (2021) revealed **mixed perceptions** regarding the absolute harm of vaping. Some young people expressed concerns about the safety of vaping products, citing unknown long-term risks, harmful chemicals and addiction potential, while others believed vaping posed no health harms⁵. These contrasting views derived from mixed messages from online sources and from what was perceived as a lack of research and a lack of consensus within public health (i.e. sometimes promoting vaping as a cessation tool). The [systematic review](#) and the [meta-ethnography](#) on emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents also found that some young people reported using e-cigarettes only under the assumption of safety and expressed willingness to quit if they learned that vaping posed health harms.
- Several systematic reviews and primary studies concluded that **adolescents generally perceived flavoured vaping products as less harmful** than unflavoured or tobacco-flavoured vaping products⁶.

⁵ A more recent [Scottish focus group study](#) (2023) supports these findings, highlighting concerns in participants about product ingredients and effects on health.

⁶ [Impact of non-menthol flavours in e-cigarettes on perceptions and use: an updated systematic review](#); [Adolescents' Health Perceptions of E-Cigarettes: A Systematic Review](#); [A systematic review of consumer preference for e-cigarette attributes: Flavor, nicotine strength, and type](#); [Associations between public e-cigarette use and tobacco-related social norms among youth](#); [A Review of the Use and Appeal of Flavored Electronic Cigarettes](#); [Do JUUL and e-cigarette flavours change risk perceptions of adolescents? Evidence from a national survey](#). To note, a more recent [US primary study](#) on vaping flavours and youth risk perceptions (2023) found no differences in youth risk perceptions between tobacco and fruit flavours. The researchers speculated this was due to an overall high risk perception of vaping products, possibly due to increased public health education or to the EVALI outbreak in the US in 2019-20. EVALI stands for e-cigarette or vaping products use-associated lung injury.

- A [systematic review](#) on adolescents' health perceptions of e-cigarettes (2021) and a [meta-ethnography](#) on emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents (2021) found that many young people expressed **concerns about the unknown harms of SHV/A**, while others simply considered SHV/A as "water vapour" or "flavoured smoke".
- Many of the reviewed sources highlighted differences in perceptions of absolute harm by vape user status, with those who vaped more likely than those who did not vape to perceive vaping in general⁷, flavoured vaping products and SHV/A⁸ as less harmful.

Relative harm to conventional cigarettes

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that overall vaping is perceived as less harmful than smoking, mostly as a result of young people's beliefs in lower addictiveness of vaping products, absence of harmful chemicals in the e-liquids and reduced health risks from SHV/A compared to second-hand smoke.

- Two meta-ethnographies on [emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescent](#) (2021) and on [young adults' e-cigarette perceptions and experiences](#) (2021), a [systematic review](#) on adolescents' health perceptions of e-cigarettes (2021) and the [Surgeon General Report](#) (2016) concluded that young people generally regarded **vaping products as less harmful than conventional cigarettes**. However, the [ASH youth vaping report](#) (2023) found that since 2013, the number of young people across Great Britain considering vaping as less harmful than smoking has been gradually decreasing, while the number of those considering vaping as more harmful than smoking has been increasing. Based on these findings and given the upward trend in vaping prevalence in Great Britain, ASH suggested that perceptions of harm may not influence uptake. Some of the reviewed sources also identified a relationship between relative harm perceptions and user status, reporting that **current users and dual users were more likely to perceive vapes as less harmful** compared to non-users⁹.
- A [systematic review](#) on adolescents' health perceptions of e-cigarettes (2021), a [systematic review and meta-analysis](#) on youth risk perceptions of e-cigarettes (2022), and two meta-ethnographies on [emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents](#) (2021) and on [young adults' e-cigarette perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use](#) (2021) collectively revealed

⁷ See also [E-cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults. A report of the Surgeon General and Association between Harmful and Addictive Perceptions of E-Cigarettes and E-Cigarette Use among Adolescents and Youth. A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.](#)

⁸ See also [Associations between public e-cigarette use and tobacco-related social norms among youth](#) and [Harm perceptions of secondhand e-cigarette aerosol among youth in the United States.](#)

⁹ [E-cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults. A report of the Surgeon General; Adolescents' Health Perceptions of E-Cigarettes: A Systematic Review; Association between Harmful and Addictive Perceptions of E-Cigarettes and E-Cigarette Use among Adolescents and Youth. A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.](#)

that reduced perception of relative harm was linked to the lack of combustion in vaping products and to **misbeliefs in the lower addictiveness of tobacco-free nicotine, absence of harmful chemicals and reduced health risks from SHV/A**. These beliefs stemmed from misinformation from advertising and marketing (particularly from social media), and lack of critical thinking at a young age. Additional studies reviewed for this briefing confirmed these misconceptions in young people deriving from a lack of clear messaging on vaping¹⁰.

Addiction

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that there are mixed perceptions around the addictiveness of vaping, with a general perception that it is less addictive than tobacco smoking. At the same time, the sources indicate how the majority of young vapers consider themselves addicted or describe their urge to vape as moderate to strong.

- A [systematic review](#) on adolescents' health perceptions of e-cigarettes (2021) and a [meta-ethnography](#) on emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents (2021) agreed that there are **mixed perceptions on the addictive quality of vaping products**. While most young people saw vaping products as somewhat addictive, there was an overall generalised perception that they were less addictive than tobacco cigarettes. The authors of the meta-ethnography considered this to be a result of misconceptions around the nature and risks of addiction coupled with contrasting public health and commercial messaging, or lack of official advice. A more recent [US experimental study](#) on labelling and misperceptions (2023) also found that two fifths of youth in the sample believed that flavoured disposable nicotine vaping products labelled as "tobacco-free nicotine" were less addictive than products labelled as "nicotine from tobacco".
- The [systematic review](#) also highlighted how a significant proportion of e-cigarette users believed they would not become addicted to e-cigarettes and that it would be **easy to quit** if they chose to. These findings are confirmed by an additional [US study](#) (2021) reviewed for this briefing which concluded that over half of teenagers were optimistically biased about their individual ability to quit vaping.
- A [systematic review and meta-analysis](#) on adolescents and youth risk perceptions of e-cigarettes (2022) found that **ever users were more likely than non-users to perceive e-cigarettes as less addictive** than tobacco cigarettes.
- The King's College London [Vaping in England evidence review](#) (2022), a [study on adolescents' experiences of vaping](#) (2021) and the [ASH SmokeFree GB Youth survey](#) (2023) highlighted how **the majority of young vapers**

¹⁰ [A qualitative study of e-cigarette emergence and the potential for renormalisation of smoking in UK youth; Youth's engagement and perceptions of disposable e-cigarettes: a UK focus group study; Adolescent Use and Perceptions of JUUL and Other Pod-Style e-Cigarettes: A Qualitative Study to Inform Prevention.](#)

considered themselves addicted or described their urge to vape as moderate to strong. Two US studies on [vaping among teens](#) (2021) and [adolescents' experiences of vaping](#) (2021) also reported how participants said they experienced an unanticipated addiction. Additionally, a [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults' perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use (2021) found that the lack of natural "end point" of vaping products (compared to conventional cigarettes which burn to their end) led users to feel they were excessively consuming nicotine, due to the inability to quantify consumption and psychological addiction.

The role of warning labels on packaging

The evidence on the role played by warning labels on packaging is mixed with a systematic review concluding that warning labels are associated with increased harm perception among youth, but more recent primary studies suggesting that warning labels are not effective at influencing risk perceptions.

- A [systematic review](#) on the effectiveness of vaping regulatory strategies (2024) concluded that **warning labels were associated with increased harm perception among youths**, hence decreased intention to initiate vaping.
- A recent [primary study](#) on responses to textual warning labels on e-cigarette advertisements (2024) concluded that **warning messages are ineffective at influencing youth risk perceptions** or willingness to use/quit e-cigarettes. Additionally, the [Cancer Research UK report](#) (2023) shows how participants in the focus groups claimed not to pay attention to warning labels (despite noticing their presence) and were cynical about manufacturers' reasons for including them (i.e. to protect themselves rather than the user).

Acceptability

Systematic reviews and meta-ethnographies examined for this briefing suggest that youth acceptability of vaping is linked to its normalisation (e.g. due to its popularity), its perception as a social activity and use of vaping products as a stress-management tool. Many young people approve of vaping products as cessation tools but they also recognise the environmental impact of plastic/batteries they contain. More details on each of these aspects are presented below.

Normalisation

No systematic reviews/meta-ethnographies existed on this theme. The primary research sources examined suggest that the normalisation of vaping is linked to its popularity, high exposure to packaging and lack of restrictions on vaping locations. A potential association between familial/peer behaviours and normative beliefs, and vaping has also been identified.

- A [qualitative study](#) by Cancer Research UK (2023) found that youths perceive **vaping as more normalised** than tobacco smoking due to the popularity of e-cigarettes, increased exposure to e-cigarette packaging and fewer restrictions

on vaping locations (especially when compared to stricter regulations on conventional cigarette displays and smoke-free spaces). This study, together with research on [adolescent use and perceptions of vaping products](#) (2021) and on [vaping among teens](#) (2021), revealed a widespread perception of high vaping prevalence, which further contributed towards perceived indirect peer pressure to partake in vaping.

- Three primary studies suggest a potential positive **association between familial and peer behaviours, normative beliefs, and the use and perceptions of vaping products** among youth. A [primary study](#) on home e-cigarette rules and youth behaviours (2022) concluded that strict home rules were significantly associated with young people's perceptions of parental disapproval and higher perceptions of harmfulness. A [Canadian qualitative study](#) (2023) also found that participants who vaped held approving behavioural and normative beliefs on vaping, including that it makes you look cool and is endorsed by peers. On the other hand, participants who didn't vape reported being influenced in that by disapproval from their familial and social networks. Finally, a [US qualitative study](#) on regular e-cigarette users' behaviours, attitudes and familial norms (2019) revealed how many participants reported that their family members knew they were e-cigarette users and received implicit and explicit messages with neutral or positive attitudes (which may have encouraged initiation and continued use according to the researchers).

Social acceptability

The sources examined for this briefing suggest that young people deem newer models of vaping products more socially acceptable than older models. Young people also think that vaping products are bad for the environment as they are non-recyclable.

- Several papers identified a **hierarchy of vaping and smoking products** among the youth. A [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults' perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use (2021) and a [Scottish focus group study](#) on youth's engagement and perceptions of disposable e-cigarettes (2023) agreed that young people deemed smaller and newer models (e.g. disposables) as more socially acceptable than older and larger models (seen as bulky and ostentatious), or conventional cigarettes. A [US focus group study](#) (2021) also found that young people had distinct understandings of vapes, e-cigarettes and cigarettes, where vapes were positively associated with smaller models, fun flavours, young people, school environment, social activity and social popularity; e-cigarettes were understood as the older versions of these models, used by older people and for smoking cessation¹¹; and conventional cigarettes were negatively associated with health harms, bad smell, second-hand smoke and old people. Similarly, the young people

¹¹ Adolescent participants in a [Scottish focus group study](#) (2023) also considered disposable vapes as distinct from e-cigarettes, with several participants easily recognising disposable e-cigarettes, but not other models.

participating in a [UK qualitative study](#) (2020) widely rejected the term “e-cigarette” in favour of “vape”, given its association with older models designed to mimic the appearance of conventional cigarettes.

- Two meta-ethnographies on [emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents](#) (2021) and on [young adults' e-cigarette perceptions and experiences](#) (2021) concluded that youth **perceptions of vapes often varied by user status**. The researchers found that vapers were more likely to have positive perceptions of vaping as “cool”, “fun” and “fashionable”, whereas non-vapers were more likely to have negative perceptions of vaping as “uncool”, a “fad” or a passing “trend”, and saw their peer vapers as “wannabe” or “embarrassing”. Non-vaping youths in a [US focus group study](#) (2021) also criticised their peer vapers, claiming they thought they were “invincible” and not subject to potential harms. Several studies¹² agreed that the perceived “coolness” of vaping was associated to the **experimentation** with different flavours and vapour clouds/tricks (often shared on social media), and that many young people saw vaping as a **social activity** to “fit in” with friends.
- A [UK qualitative study](#) on e-cigarette emergence and the potential for renormalisation of smoking (2020) and a [GB mixed-method study](#) on young people’s use of e-cigarettes (2020) found that, irrespective of user status, **adolescents approved of vaping when used socially**, but disapproved of regular use.
- A [meta-ethnography](#) on emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents (2021) found that discreetly purchasing vapes in shops and online was seen as a **transgressive behaviour** to test and push boundaries.
- A [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults’ perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use (2021) found that young people had a perceived conscientiousness when vaping as they believed **SHV/A was better for the environment compared to tobacco smoke**. However, two more recent primary studies on [youth’s engagement and perceptions of disposable e-cigarettes](#) (2023) and on [factors influencing decision-making in both youth who vape and don’t vape](#) (2023) also concluded that young people understood vaping products as **bad for the environment**, due to the waste (i.e. batteries and plastic) they generate.

Cessation

The evidence examined for this briefing suggests that young people approve of vaping products when used for cessation purposes and believe they are effective smoking cessation tools.

¹² [The emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents: A meta-ethnography of qualitative evidence](#); ["That's the whole thing about vaping, it's custom tasty goodness": a meta-ethnography of young adults' perceptions and experiences of e-cigarette use](#); [A Review of the Use and Appeal of Flavored Electronic Cigarettes](#); [Adolescents Who Vape Nicotine and Their Experiences Vaping: A Qualitative Study](#); ["If Someone Has It, I'm Gonna Hit It": Lessons Learned From Minnesota Teens About Vaping](#).

- A [meta-ethnography](#) on young adults' e-cigarette perceptions and experiences (2021) and the [Nicotine vaping in England](#) report (2022) found that **young people perceived vaping products as effective cessation tools**. The findings from the meta-ethnography also reflect the conclusion of a meta-ethnography on [emerging norms of e-cigarette use among adolescents](#) (2021) that **young people approved of vapes when used for cessation purposes**, but not when used without a history of smoking. Furthermore, the meta-ethnographies revealed that approval of vaping products as cessation tools from authoritative figures, such as parents, contributed to a reduced perception of relative harm and to the normalisation of vaping.

Stress relief

The evidence examined for this briefing suggests that adolescent vapers perceive vaping products as an effective tool for managing stress and anxiety.

- A [systematic review](#) on adolescents' health perceptions of e-cigarettes (2021) and primary studies reviewed for this briefing revealed that many youths perceived vaping as a coping mechanism to manage stress and anxiety¹³.

¹³ [Adolescents Who Vape Nicotine and Their Experiences Vaping: A Qualitative Study; "If Someone Has It, I'm Gonna Hit It": Lessons Learned From Minnesota Teens About Vaping; Factors that influence decision-making among youth who vape and youth who don't vape; Adolescent Use and Perceptions of JUUL and Other Pod-Style e-Cigarettes: A Qualitative Study to Inform Prevention.](#)



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