

# **Tobacco & Vapes Act**

## **Public Consultation on packaging, appearance and display**

### **Q&A**

#### **Consultation - general**

##### **What is this consultation about?**

The UK-wide consultation will seek views on proposals relating to the display of products and prices, packaging and device appearance of tobacco, vaping and nicotine products.

##### **How do these proposals support public health outcomes?**

By reducing the visibility of these products and therefore the appeal and attractiveness to children and young people, this will reduce youth vaping and prevent future generations from nicotine addiction and the wider risk of harm from vaping and other nicotine products.

##### **What is the harm of vapes, aren't they safer than smoking?**

Although vaping is less harmful than smoking nicotine, it is not risk-free. Most vapes contain nicotine, which is a harmfully addictive drug. Regular use can lead to dependence, particularly among young people.

Recent evidence indicates that vaping prevalence among children and young people locally has increased. A Public Health Agency (PHA) report on youth vaping in Northern Ireland (2025) reported that 20% of 11–16-year-olds had tried a nicotine vape at least once and 15% are current nicotine vape users. Many young people who vape were not previously smokers; evidence has shown that young people who vape are more likely to start smoking than those who never vape.

The health advice is clear: while vapes can be an effective aid to help some adult smokers to quit, vaping is not harm-free and the long-term health impacts are unknown. That is why children and non-smokers should never vape.

##### **What is the deadline for responses?**

The consultation launched on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2026 and will last 12 weeks, closing at 23:59 on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

## Who is this consultation aimed at?

The consultation is aimed at the general public, including young people, parents, teachers and medical professionals. It also seeks input directly from local councils, industry bodies, retailers and other interested stakeholders, to help shape regulations to stop these products from appealing to young people and children.

## How can individuals and organisations respond?

The consultation can be accessed on the gov.uk website here: [Tobacco and vapes: packaging, appearance and display - GOV.UK](#)

## Does the public support this policy approach?

The UK-wide consultation on '*Creating a smokefree generation and tackling youth vaping consultation*'<sup>1</sup> found the majority of respondents were in favour of the proposed measures to tackle youth vaping, particularly restricting point of sale displays and restricting packaging. In the consultation, 68.3% of respondents agreed that vapes should be kept behind the counter and should not be on display.

## What's the evidence that this will work?

There is evidence that plain packaging<sup>2</sup>, display restrictions and device appearance can reduce the visibility and appeal of tobacco and vaping products, particularly among young people<sup>3</sup>. The consultation is an important step in gathering views on how these measures should be designed and implemented to maximise public health benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping/outcome/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping-consultation-government-response#reducing-the-appeal-and-availability-of-vapes-to-chil](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping/outcome/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping-consultation-government-response#reducing-the-appeal-and-availability-of-vapes-to-chil)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-standardised-packaging-of-tobacco-products-regulations-2015-post-implementation-review>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/youth-vaping-call-for-evidence/outcome/youth-vaping-call-for-evidence-analysis>

## **What is the Devolved Government consent process?**

Subject to the outcome of this consultation, the UKG Secretary of State for Health will then use regulation-making powers within the Tobacco and Vapes Act to make regulations on packaging and devices.

Display of products and prices is a devolved matter for the Department of Health NI under Part 3 of the Act and will be subject to the affirmative procedure in the NI Assembly.

## **Displays**

### **Why is the Government proposing to introduce changes to the retail display of tobacco, vaping and nicotine products?**

Evidence shows that a significant factor in the growth in youth vaping is the prominent display of these products in shops<sup>4</sup>. Many vaping and nicotine products are brightly coloured, heavily branded and displayed within sight of children, sometimes alongside confectionery.

The UK-wide consultation proposes restrictions on where vaping and nicotine products can be displayed in shops, to reduce the visibility of these products and therefore the appeal and attractiveness to children and young people. The aim is to reduce youth vaping and prevent future generations from nicotine addiction and the wider risk of harm from vaping and other nicotine products.

### **Will vaping and nicotine products be kept in cabinets out of sight, as with tobacco?**

Following public consultation, the Northern Ireland Health Minister intends to make regulations for NI to restrict the display of vaping and nicotine products, which may include storing products out of sight, such as behind the counter or in closed cabinets.

This will reduce the visibility of these products and therefore the appeal and attractiveness to children and young people. The overall aim is to reduce youth vaping and prevent future generations from nicotine addiction and the wider risk of harm from vaping and other nicotine products.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/youth-vaping-call-for-evidence/outcome/youth-vaping-call-for-evidence-analysis>

**Why are you proposing to remove the exemption on bulk tobacconists / duty free settings?**

Allowing tobacco products to be displayed in premises that are accessible to children and young people undermines the wider policy objective of reducing the visibility and appeal of tobacco products.

Some retailers that use the bulk tobacconist exemption (such as duty-free shops) also stock products aimed at children and therefore attract large numbers of customers aged 17 and under. For example, an airport duty-free shop can display and sell super-size packs of toys, sweets and confectionery.

**Why are you proposing to keep the exemption for trade premises and specialist tobacconists?**

The consultation proposes to retain display exemptions for relevant trade premises (to allow for the display of cigarette papers, heated devices, herbal smoking products and prices) that are only accessible to people working in the tobacco trade and which are essential for legitimate business operations.

The consultation also proposes that specialist tobacconists are allowed to continue to display tobacco products and prices, as long as they are not visible to the public from outside the premises. The exemption will not apply to the display of vape or nicotine products in specialist tobacconists.

**Are you proposing an exemption for display of vaping and nicotine products in community pharmacies?**

UKG is exploring options for limited display exemptions for vaping and nicotine products in community pharmacies.

This will not apply in Northern Ireland, because e-cigarettes (nicotine vapes) are not used as a smoking cessation tool / quit aid as they are not licensed as medicines for smoking cessation by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

All products recommended by smoking cessation services in Northern Ireland are medically licensed Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) products, which fall outside the scope of the Tobacco and Vapes Act.

## **Packaging**

### **Why is the Government proposing to introduce changes to packaging of tobacco, vape and nicotine products?**

There is well-established evidence<sup>5</sup> that packaging increases the attractiveness of these products. The UK-wide consultation proposes to introduce new packaging requirements to reduce the appeal of these products to children and young people.

### **Will vape and nicotine products only be sold in future in plain packaging?**

There is well-established evidence<sup>6</sup> that packaging increases the attractiveness of vaping and nicotine products and the likelihood of people using them. The consultation proposes the introduction of plain white packaging requirements for vaping and nicotine products, with limited imagery and branding.

The aim is to reduce youth vaping and prevent future generations from nicotine addiction and the wider risk of harm from vaping and other nicotine products.

### **What is the Government proposing for Tobacco Products?**

The UKG is proposing an extension of the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015<sup>7</sup> to extend existing tobacco plain packaging, to all tobacco products, herbal smoking products, cigarette papers and heated tobacco devices as well as the inclusion of positive quit-themed pack inserts within tobacco product packaging, herbal smoking products and heated tobacco devices.

This will reduce their appeal, provide greater consistency across broad range of tobacco products and ensure that people using these products also receive evidence-based health information and encouragement to quit.

## **Device appearance**

### **Why is the Government proposing to introduce changes to the appearance of heated tobacco devices and vaping devices?**

Like vape packaging, heated tobacco devices come in a variety of attractive colours and designs, including emulating the appearance of other products, all of which can appeal to children and young people.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/standardised-packaging-of-tobacco-report-of-the-independent-review/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/standardised-packaging-of-tobacco-report-of-the-independent-review/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/829/pdfs/uksi\\_20150829\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/829/pdfs/uksi_20150829_en.pdf)

Making changes to reduce the appeal and attractiveness of these products to children and young people will help to reduce youth vaping and prevent future generations from nicotine addiction.

### **What changes is the Government proposing to introduce to vaping devices?**

The UK-wide consultation proposes restricting vape devices to only white, black and grey to reduce the appeal of these products to children and young people. This will help to reduce the visibility and appeal of these products to children and young people.

There has been a recent rise in 'gamification' of vape devices, such as through the use of leaderboards for consumption. The consultation also proposes to restrict digital screens so that only safety and status information are permitted to be displayed.

### **What changes is the Government proposing to introduce to heated tobacco devices?**

The UK-wide consultation proposes restricting heated tobacco devices to a drab dark brown to reduce the appeal of these products to children and young people. This will help to reduce the visibility and appeal of these products to children and young people.

## **Help for smokers who wish to quit**

### **How are you supporting current smokers to quit?**

The Public Health Agency funds a range of free stop smoking support services to help people to quit smoking in Northern Ireland.

Smokers can access these free services in a range of local settings, including GP practices, pharmacies, hospitals and some community and voluntary sector organisations. Services are provided by specialist practitioners who have received specific training and clients receive a combination of pharmacotherapy / nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and behavioural support over the course of 12 weeks.

E-cigarettes (nicotine vapes) are not used as a smoking cessation tool / quit aid in Northern Ireland as e-cigarettes (nicotine vapes) are not licensed as medicines for smoking cessation by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). To find out more [About Stop Smoking NI | Stop Smoking](#)

## **Do Stop Smoking Services in Northern Ireland provide vapes to help people stop smoking?**

PHA commissioned stop smoking services currently recommend evidence-based, medically-licensed stop smoking treatments, including pharmacotherapy/nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) to support adults to stop smoking. E-cigarettes (nicotine vapes) are not used as a smoking cessation tool/quit aid in Northern Ireland as e-cigarettes (nicotine vapes) are not licensed as medicines for smoking cessation by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

## **Do Stop Smoking Services in Northern Ireland provide support to help people stop vaping**

The new service specification for Stop Smoking Services in Northern Ireland considers NICE guidance in relation to vaping. PHA Commissioned Services will provide support and advice to individuals who choose to use e-cigarettes / nicotine vapes to quit smoking. Services may also support individuals who wish to stop using e-cigarettes / nicotine vapes (timeline TBC).

## **Impact on retailers & manufacturers**

### **Will these proposals lead to costs for businesses?**

It is anticipated that there may be one off costs for retailers in terms of staff training, storage, reconfiguration of retail environments and potential reduction of revenue linked to lower product demand.

The Department is working with key stakeholders, including retail organisations and local councils to develop guidance.

### **Will this put more pressure on businesses?**

The Department is aware of the pressures facing businesses. The overall aim of the policy is to reduce the appeal of these harmful products, particularly to young people, while allowing businesses time to adapt and continue to operate successfully.

Departmental policy officials have met with retail organisations and continue to engage with key stakeholders, including retail sector and councils, to develop guidance for retailers.

### **Is this the end of the high street? Are you effectively banning vape shops?**

The proposed approach largely builds on existing tobacco display regulations (which prohibit the display of tobacco) which retailers are already familiar with. In the future

shops will still be able to sell vapes, however they will need to follow regulatory proposals which aim to reduce the appeal to young people and children.

The Department continues to engage with key stakeholders, including retail organisations and councils, and guidance is being developed to support retailers.

Extending the Retail Register to include vape and other nicotine product retailers will allow us to strengthen enforcement, support legitimate businesses and act as a deterrent for rogue traders, which will in turn support the department's strategic aim of improving public health.

### **Will these proposals impact Manufacturers?**

There will be costs for manufacturers to redesign packaging to meet new regulatory requirements, as well as to amend the appearance of devices, to remove features that may increase appeal of these products to young people and children.

### **Has impact assessment been carried out?**

The UKG impact assessments set out the key benefits that are expected to be delivered by the policies, including, health benefits to individuals and environmental benefits of from reduced use of products in scope. A separate Regulatory Impact Assessment is being drafted for NI.

## **Enforcement**

### **How will these proposals be enforced?**

It is our intention that these proposals will be enforced by district councils in Northern Ireland. The is the same way existing display, product and packaging requirements for tobacco are enforced now.

### **How will you fund enforcement of the proposed policies?**

There are 12 Tobacco Control Officers (TCOs) operating across the 11 councils in Northern Ireland, funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA) under the Department's Tobacco Control Strategy. TCOs are responsible for enforcement of tobacco and nicotine-related legislation to support public health objectives in NI.

The Department is working with Councils through a Joint Implementation Group (JIG). Chaired by the Chief Environmental Health Officer, the JIG facilitates clear and timely discussion and communications in relation to regulatory arrangements, identifies potential operational and enforcement implications and ensures that

appropriate measures are in place for coordinated and effective implementation and enforcement.

## **Illicit / illegal tobacco**

### **Why not focus on illegal sales and enforcing age of sale, instead of regulating the display and device appearance of tobacco, vaping and nicotine products?**

The enforcement landscape relating to tobacco in NI is complex, encompassing both the sale of illegal or illicit tobacco (including smuggled, counterfeit, or duty-unpaid products) and the unlawful sale of otherwise legal tobacco, particularly breaches of age-of-sale legislation.

Whilst Councils in NI are responsible for legislation relating to age of sale of tobacco and vapes, enforcement of legislation relating to the illicit or illegal tobacco and vapes falls across several organisations, including PSNI, HMRC, Border Force and Trading Standards Service. Each organisation has its own responsibilities and works within different legislative frameworks.

Tackling all forms of illegal tobacco and vapes requires a coordinated and effective enforcement approach and the Department is working closely with the Department of Justice and other enforcement agencies to support effective joint working.

### **Won't more regulation lead to a boom in the black market?**

The tobacco industry has lobbied against some of the progressive tobacco control measures introduced by the Act, raising fears of increased criminal activity. Critics of the legislation say that prohibition will not reduce demand, only push it into the 'black market', which will lead to increased organised crime.

Evaluations of the impact of these measures repeatedly conclude that they do not contribute to increasing rates of out-of-country purchases, illicit tobacco or cross-border purchases of tobacco products <sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/Tobacco-Generational-Endgame-Policies.pdf>

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## **Licensing**

### **Has the Department undertaken any assessment of the potential benefits of a retail licensing scheme for retailers selling vaping and nicotine products?**

The Tobacco and Vapes Act provides powers for retail licensing schemes to be established in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, for the sale of tobacco, vapes and nicotine products.

Licensing will strengthen enforcement, support legitimate businesses and act as a deterrent to rogue retailers, which in turn will support the Department's strategic aim of improving public health.

Licensing will be introduced in the longer term, following public consultation and subsequent regulations. No decisions have been made yet on a timescale for public consultation on licensing

### **Is there a timescale for when licensing will be introduced in NI?**

The UK-wide Tobacco and Vapes Act provides powers for retail licensing schemes to be established in Northern Ireland, for the sale of tobacco, vapes and nicotine products.

Introducing a licensing scheme will allow us to strengthen enforcement, support legitimate businesses and act as a deterrent to rogue retailers, which in turn will support the Department's strategic aim of improving public health. Licensing will be introduced in the longer term, following public consultation and subsequent regulations. No decisions have been made yet on a timescale for public consultation on licensing.

### **What enforcement measures are being introduced in the short term?**

In the interim (until a licensing scheme is introduced in the longer term) the NI Health Minister has made the decision to extend the current Tobacco Retail Register of Northern Ireland to include businesses that sell vapes and other nicotine products.

From 29<sup>th</sup> October 2026, all businesses which sell these products will be required to register on the new Northern Ireland Tobacco, Vape and Nicotine Retail Register. This will allow us to strengthen enforcement, support legitimate businesses and act as a deterrent for rogue traders, which will in turn support the departments strategic aim for improving public health.