

# Young peoples experiences of vaping in West Northamptonshire

June  
2024





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# Summary

**In the Autumn of 2023 Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire was commissioned by Public Health West Northamptonshire to gather the views of young people in West Northamptonshire who use vapes or similar nicotine products.**

To complete this work focus group questions were devised by the Public Health team for us to ask to young people in a focus group or one to one setting.

In May and June 2024, 11 young people took part in this work. Eight in a focus group setting and 3 in one-to-one interviews.



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# Recommendations

1. Provide information to young people about how to spot counterfeit goods including vapes
2. Provide information to young people about addiction and the impact that vaping can have on their health and wellbeing.
3. Design a stop vaping service that has various options for young people to access, acknowledging that one size does not fit all young people.

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# Response from Public Health West Northamptonshire

The insights Healthwatch gathered on young people's views on vaping have been reviewed and added to other engagement work that the Public Health team and Ngage have completed. This has provided an understanding of young people's experiences of vaping and what types of support they want to reduce vaping. This has been used to consider the options for supporting young people, and Public Health are now planning on working with the Stop Smoking team to pilot an offer for young people who want advice and support to stop vaping. This is alongside the development of guidance for schools and working with Ngage to design and deliver training, education and communications on smoking and vaping, for schools, children and young people and their families.

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# Background

Public Health West Northamptonshire wanted to understand the motivation for young people in the local area to use vapes and electronic cigarettes. The aim of the work is to be able to build a specific service for young people to support them in stopping vaping. Vaping is not safe for children and young people due to their developing lungs and brains, this can leave young people more sensitive to the effects that vaping can cause. In the UK the minimum age for the sale of vaping products is 18 and it is illegal to sell nicotine vaping products to anyone under the age of 18 or for adults to buy them on behalf of anyone under 18<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the fact that is illegal for young people to buy nicotine vaping products there is thought to have been an increase in youth vaping, with 1 in 5 children and young people having tried vaping. It is thought that 69% of vape users are currently aged 11 to 17 across the country<sup>2</sup>.

This report will be part of a wider piece of work that Public Health West Northamptonshire are doing around vaping and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/vaping-to-quit-smoking/young-people-and-vaping/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/04/15/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping-what-you-need-to-know/>

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# Method

## Focus groups

We held one focus group in a mainstream secondary school in Northampton Town. There were four young people who were selected by the school and were known to have been vaping either currently or previously.

We held one focus group in a post 16 specialist education setting. There were four young people that took part that were selected by staff.

## Interviews

We recruited young people through social media to carry out interviews over the phone or online. The young people that took part in the interviews were self selected or selected by their parents and carers.

The questions asked to all young people were the same.

## Limitations

Various schools and education settings were contacted to take part in the project. There was not a fantastic take up due to the stigma attached to vaping and young people and the time available to staff to carry out the focus groups. There was assurance given that every school and young person would not be identifiable.



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# What people told us

- We spoke to one 20 year old, one 19 year old, one 17 year olds, one 16 year old, four 15 year olds, one 14 year old and two 13 year olds
- Eight young people told us that they use vapes regularly and three told us that they have tried vaping
- Three young people told us that as well as vaping regularly they also smoked on a regular basis.

## Where do you get your vapes from?

Some young people told us that they were able to buy vapes from shops themselves. They reported that this was easy and that often shops did not ask for proof of age. One young person told us that when they tried to do this a shopkeeper tried to kiss them. The money that young people use to buy their vapes usually comes from pocket money or birthday and Christmas money although some young people did tell us that they use the money that they get from their benefits or savings.

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*Town – Shops on the Welly road and Kettering Road. Buy them myself, you don't need fake ID (13 and 15 year old).*

*I use my brothers or my friends*

*Older friends buy them for me*

*When asked where do they get the money – Birthday or Christmas money. Pocket money.*

*Mostly town, my friend buys them for me, he is 15. I get the money from my pocket money.*

*The corner shop, I don't get asked for ID (16).*

*The Vape Shops and they never ask for ID (19)*



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*My mum buys them for me, because at a shop that I tried to buy them from the shop keeper tried to kiss me, my mum thought I was being put in a vulnerable position and so from then on has got them for me.*

*Mum and dad get them for me.*

*I get them from my friends.*

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### **Where do you vape? Where do you see other young people vaping?**

Most young people told us that they vaped at school. This was not done openly and one young person told us that they were worried of getting permanently excluded.

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#### *School*

*Out of bounds areas at school.*

*Toilets at School – School blocking off toilets isn't helpful when I actually need the toilet. We don't snitch if we see someone vaping.*

*In class, I will leave class if I know there is an opportunity during lessons. I don't miss class to vape but some people do.*

*Toilets at school, not during lesson time as it is a permanent exclusion<sup>3</sup> if I am caught with a vape at school.*

*Teachers talking to us before searching us. Teachers could be nicer.*

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<sup>3</sup> no longer allowed to attend school.

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Some young people vaped in public and at home or at friends houses.

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*In public and at home.*

*Mostly in public, I don't vape at school and my mum knows I vape but doesn't want me vaping in the house and I have respected that.*

*My bedroom.*

*In public, I don't care what people think.*

*The public don't seem to mind vaping as much as smoking.*

*In public. Friends' houses if their parents allow them to vape, but I always make sure its ok to do so first.*

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### **Why do you vape?**

Young people talked about a sense of community and belonging.

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*It gives me a sense of community, other people to talk to.*

*I feel like it can help with having something to talk about and opens up conversations.*

*Lots of people do bond over vapes. I have flavoured vapes and they taste nice, I enjoy it.*

*It is nice to have a sense that people like me and so they talk to me.*

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Some young people talked of starting due to peers and not knowing that they could get addicted.

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*I thought it was cool. Didn't think I would get addicted. But now I want to vape more.*

*I wanted to see why others do it.*

*Well for me there isn't a reason, I tried a friends in year 8 and have done it from then on.*

*They are really easy to get hold of and friends have them.*

*I started because of peer pressure and now I feel like I have to have a vape.*

*My girlfriend vaped so I started, I stopped because it was impacting my stamina at football.*

*I have flavoured vapes and they taste nice, I enjoy it.*

*I don't know why I started, the packaging and flavours looked nice.*

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Some young people told us that they vape to support their emotional wellbeing. Some young people also reported that their past experiences impacted why they vaped.

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*When I have really stressful moments I vape to calm me down at that time. For me it is a coping mechanism, for my mental health, or if I am in a stressful situation. I have been to the Lowdown a few times and CAMHS<sup>4</sup> didn't accept me, I have been to the NHS for sessions on mental health, it didn't make me want to stop vaping but it did help me a bit. When the sessions stopped, I started vaping more as I didn't have anyone to talk to anymore.*

*When I am at school and get stressed out, I go and vape.*

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<sup>4</sup> Childrens and Adolescents Mental Health Services

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*I smoke and vape due to trauma. I started when I was 9, I grew up around duggies that were family friends.*

*I started vaping and smoking at around 7 or 8. I started smoking because I went through depression and anxiety from getting removed from my family and in to care, I was put in care at about 6 years old. Older lads, in the local area, would get me vapes. There was someone in my foster home who was older and would get me vapes too.*

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### **What support do you want with vaping?**

Some young people told us that right now they didn't want any support with vaping.

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*None*

*At this moment at time, I don't think I want any, I don't want to stop right now. But I don't want to vape for years and years as it will just get harder to stop.*

*I want to know how to quit when I am ready to.*

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Some young people told us that they wanted to know which vapes were safe and wanted to make it harder for young people to but them as they appeal to young people.

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*Make them harder to buy and to access.*

*Know which ones are safe.*

*Remove flavours and colours make vapes less accessible to kids and less appealing.*

*I want to know which ones are safe. Vaping is bad so I would rather be doing it in a safer way. I would like to know how to*

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*spot the fake vapes as I know there are a lot around. I can spot some fake ones as they change the name slightly.*

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## **How would you like to stop vaping? Who would you like to support you? Where would you like that support?**

The support that young people wanted varied. Some young people wanted to understand and have the adults they come in to contact with understand that it is an addiction.

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*I want something to make it easier to quit, I'm not sure what. An app wouldn't work really. Some information about what it does to my health and addiction.*

*School to be more understanding that it is an addiction.*

*Someone who has vaped themselves.*

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Some told us that they would like group sessions. They didn't feel the support would be best delivered by a teacher and someone highlighted the importance of not having parents involvement.

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*Group sessions with just those that vape (similar to this) – 4 or 5 people it is easier to open up.*

*Not a teacher – Someone who has been through it and vapes/d or smokes/d themselves.*

*Away from parents as most parents don't know that their child vapes.*

*It doesn't matter to me if it is someone I know.*

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The importance of the anti-vaping message was highlighted to educate young people.

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*Posters – similar to the anti smoking message in school, in public and in classrooms.*

*I would use a website if it was a good website, I might use an app.*

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Some told us that group sessions would not work for them

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*I'm not really sure. I don't like group sessions as I find it hard to speak up in a group of people. I would prefer one on one and not in school as if I get stressed or it went wrong I would want to be able to go home rather than back to a lesson.*

*It would be difficult to talk in a group because there would be a fear of judgement. Maybe a face to face one on one session.*

*Something that I could relate to that would take me through it step by step. I wouldn't like in person sessions, I don't like talking to people.*

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# Acknowledgements

Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire would like to thank:

- **Young people that took part in the focus groups and interviews.**
- **Schools and education settings that have supported this project.**

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# About Healthwatch West and North Northamptonshire

Healthwatch West and North Northamptonshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and social care. We are part of a national network of local Healthwatch organisations. Our central role is to be a voice for local people to influence better health and wellbeing and improve the quality of services to meet people's needs. This involves us visiting local services and talking to people about their views and experiences. We share our reports with the NHS and social care, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (the inspector and regulator for health and social care), with recommendations for improvement, where required.

Our rights and responsibilities include:

- **We have the power to monitor (known as “Enter and View”) health and social care services (with one or two exceptions). Our primary purpose is to find out what patients, service users, carers and the wider public think of health and social care.**
- **We report our findings of local views and experiences to health and social care decision makers and make the case for improved services where we find there is a need for improvement**
- **We strive to be a strong and powerful voice for local people, to influence how services are planned, organised and delivered.**
- **We aim to be an effective voice rooted in the community. To be that voice, we find out what local people think about health and social care. We research patient, user and carer opinions using lots of different ways of finding out views and experiences. We do this to give local people a voice. We provide information and advice about health and social care services.**
- **Where we do not feel the views and voices of Healthwatch Northamptonshire and the people who we strive to speak on behalf of, are being heard, we have the option to escalate our concerns and report our evidence to national organisations including Healthwatch England, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission.**





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# About Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire

Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire are a group of young people between the ages of 11 to 24 who are health and social care champions.

What we do:

- **Look at local health and social care issues**
- **Give young people a voice for all aspects of health and social care locally.**
- **Work with professionals on the health and wellbeing of young people locally and nationally**
- **Set our own work plan**
- **Learn new skills**
- **Report back to the Healthwatch Northamptonshire Board**



**yhwnorthamptonshire**



**younghealthwatchnorthamptonshire**



**YHW Northamptonshire**



**YHWNorth1**

If you are a professional that wants to work with us please contact us on the details on the next page or email [younghealthwatch@healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk](mailto:younghealthwatch@healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk)

**Young**  
**healthwatch**  
Northamptonshire

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# About Connected Together CIC

Connected Together Community Interest Company (CTCIC) is a social enterprise and a partnership between the University of Northampton and Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire.

We have expertise and experience in delivering community engagement, research, surveys, training and more. Connected Together Community Interest Company (CIC) is the legal entity and governing body for Healthwatch Rutland and Healthwatch Northamptonshire.

The remit of the Connected Together CIC includes:

- Contract compliance
- Legal requirements
- Financial and risk management
- Sustainability and growth
- Agreeing strategy and operations
- Agreeing policies and procedures



**Connected Together**  
First for Community Engagement



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# Contact us

Address: Healthwatch Northamptonshire  
Moulton Park Business Centre,  
Redhouse Road,  
Northampton,  
NN3 6AQ



Phone number: 0300 002 0010

Email: [younghealthwatch@healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk](mailto:younghealthwatch@healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk)

Website: [www.healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Healthwatchnorthamptonshire](http://www.facebook.com/Healthwatchnorthamptonshire)

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