

# Young people and vaping in Haringey

September 2025



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# Executive Summary

This report is the product of a four-month exploration into pupils' views and attitudes towards vaping across several schools within the London Borough of Haringey.

The research explores attitudes towards, and awareness of, vaping and vaping products among secondary school pupils in Haringey. The research also explores vape usage, health implications, the attraction and appeal of vapes, and the motivations for vaping.

The aim of this research was to inform thinking on how engagement with young people can be conducted; and to help schools in Haringey think about specific policies, approaches, and alternative support for pupils in Haringey who may be vaping, contrary to the automatic exclusion of pupils.

The research found that vaping is regarded as socially acceptable among pupils. They find it easy to obtain vapes which may contain unknown substances in some cases. Social media has played a role in the attraction and popularity of vaping among young people. The report recommends increased joint-working among local partners, schools and healthcare services. The full research insights and recommendations are set out on pages 7 and 8.

The findings from this research will continue to inform and shape the next phase of the Superzones project, i.e. a targeted campaign aimed at raising awareness of vaping harms, with supporting workshops and educational materials targeted at schools and parents.

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# Background and context

In September 2023, Public Voice CIC and Healthwatch Haringey were commissioned by Haringey Public Health to conduct research into the attitudes and behaviours among secondary school-age pupils around vaping as part of the Greater London Authority (GLA) School Superzones Programme.

The aim of this research was to inform thinking on how engagement with these groups could be carried out; and to help schools in Haringey think about specific policies, approaches and alternative support for pupils in Haringey who may be vaping. In this summary report, we capture key insights from this project. We discuss our methodology, our findings, the strengths and limitations of the research project. We set out local and national level recommendations.

# Research methods

## Our research methods for this project comprised:

- A review of the current literature on vaping.
- Focus groups with 60 pupils at three schools identified for this project.
- Semi-Structured Interviews: We carried out interviews with
  - Six teachers - two teachers per school
  - Two school nurses - not necessarily linked to the three schools
- A survey, completed by over 350 pupils in the three secondary schools.

| School focus groups               |   |                  |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------------|
| School where focus group was held | Year/s                                  | Number of pupils |
| School A                          | Year 8<br>Year 9<br>Year 10             | 8<br>6<br>7      |
| School B                          | Mixed years                             | 23               |
| School C                          | Year 7<br>Year 8 and 9 mixed<br>Year 10 | 5<br>6<br>5      |
| Total number of pupils            |   | 60               |

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# Research methods

## Strengths and limitations of our research project

### Strengths

- The project has provided Haringey Council's Public Health team and other partners with an insight into the spread of vaping in Haringey. The findings from this research will inform and shape the next phase of the Superzones project.
- Strong insights were provided by all participants of the focus groups and interviews. It offered first-hand experiences of pupils, teachers and healthcare professionals which could be shared in safe spaces and helped us to gauge how the usage of vapes is different for adolescents and adults.
- We had a high level of engagement with the pupils, receiving 358 survey responses. The schools were very supportive in facilitating survey completion via ICT, PHSE and other lessons.
- We worked flexibly and had good communications with school leads and healthcare professionals within the school environment.

### Limitations

- We could have engaged with more secondary school pupils outside of the three main schools being explored. However, this was restricted due to the scope of the Superzones project.
- Due to time and coordination, we were unable to interview the parents that we had contacted as planned.
- Some survey answers differed from the insights from the focus groups. We found this to be due to the context in which students completed the surveys in comparison to when they were in focus groups with us.

## Research insights

- Vaping is regarded as socially acceptable among pupils.
  - There is easy access to vapes for young people in Haringey.
  - Social media has played a role in the attraction and popularity of vaping among young people.
  - Illicit vape sales are prevalent in Haringey and neighbouring boroughs.
  - Other substances are mixed into vapes, sometimes unbeknown to pupils.
  - The role of the 'micro-spaces' of vaping at schools, where small communal spaces for privacy become 'contested spaces' between privacy and the vaping.
  - Better statutory joint-working is required.
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# Literature review

## Latest research on vaping



A study by researchers from **University College London** was published in April 2025 in the journal 'Addiction', funded by Cancer Research UK. It found that the rise in vaping and e-cigarette use in the UK had stalled since January 2024.

Researchers from The **University of Bristol** published a study in the journal 'Nicotine and Alcohol Research' found that young adults who smoked between the ages of 23-24 perceived vaping as less harmful than smoking.

The researchers of this project (including Dr Katherine East and Dr Jasmine Khouja) argue that the perception that "vaping is as harmful as smoking" prevents smokers from switching to vaping, even though vaping is markedly less harmful than smoking.

A study by **Kundu et al** (2025) published in the journal 'Tobacco Induced Diseases' found substantial evidence that e-cigarette exposure is associated with biomarkers reflective of cancer disease risk.

**Manchester Metropolitan University** in March 2025 concluded a long-term study into the effects of vaping. Described as the world's first controlled study into vaping's long-term effects, it suggested that vaping is more harmful on the body than smoking.

The study noted that with vaping, as it is deemed as a 'healthier alternative', a person is more likely to take continuous puffs without knowing how much has been consumed.

The study at the university's institute of sport conducted stress-tests on participants aged between 18 and 45 to measure the elasticity of their blood vessels and the speed of blood flow to the brain.

# Literature review

## Latest research on vaping continued



Smokers and vapers had flat readings which indicated that damaged artery walls could no longer dilate – a sign of future cardiovascular problems. Blood flow to the brain in smokers and vapers was also impaired.

Materials found in vapes, such as carbonyl compound, propylene glycol and vegetable glycerine cause oxidative stress and inflammation which lead to artery inner wall damage and cell death.

Analysis from 38 schools revealed that a synthetic street drug, classified as class B alongside ketamine and GHB, was in nearly 100 devices. The researchers said they believed the substance was being put into vapes marketed as containing cannabis oil.

An investigation by the **University of Bath** tested 596 vapes confiscated in schools in London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, and South Yorkshire, and found spice in at least one vape in 28 of the schools.

The drug, which can cause heart attacks, seizures and psychotic episodes, was found in 16.6% of vapes tested, while roughly one in 100 contained THC, the psychoactive component of cannabis. One vape tested contained trace elements of heroin.

In February 2025 new research was announced to explore the long-term impact of vaping on young people and their health and wellbeing. The study is being funded by **UK Research and Innovation** and will track the lives of 100,000 young people aged 8-18 for the next ten years, collecting data on biology and behaviour.

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# Recommendations

## Local-level recommendations

- Increased joint-working among local partners, schools and healthcare services in Haringey.
- Litter-picking initiatives within schools involving pupils to actively engage in their local environment.
- Creative interventions via social media about the harms of vaping.
- Vape-bins outside schools (this was suggested by pupils in the research) and in community with associated vaping outreach activities.
- Support schools to strengthen the impact of their existing safeguarding policies around vaping, especially in high-risk areas such as toilets and playgrounds.
- Workshops and outreach about vaping for pupils at schools, along with highlighting the dangers when other substances are incorporated.
- Continue to offer non-judgmental smoking, vaping and drugs information and counselling.

## National-level recommendations

- Increased regulation of the marketing and sale of vapes to pupils.
  - Measures to make vaping less appealing to children.
  - Support parents with information about vaping so that they are equipped to have conversations with their children.
  - Tax on disposable vapes and e-cigarettes, so they are less affordable.
  - Strengthening collaboration with consistent follow-up communication and coordinated support between healthcare, schools and public health.
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# Research insights: Discussion

## 1. Vaping is regarded as socially acceptable among pupils.

The popular visibility of vapes, along with the 'pop culture' aspect of vapes and vaping as apparently common accessories, has led to a widespread acceptance of vaping.

"I can't be 22 with a highlighter in my mouth."

"They are sold like toys with all these flavours. You have adults saying they wouldn't like to smoke a vape that's not tobacco flavoured."

"They are sold in shops and clearly marketed to children. The fact that it is in all these places including pharmacies makes it seem that it is not that harmful."

**Focus group at school B, 1 February 2024**

One of the school nurses highlighted what is needed for this to change:

"Definitely more health promotion in schools and for parents as well to raise the subject very early on. I think the companies that make these vapes, make them to target younger people - the colours you know in a lot of ways, the flavours..."

"So, I think also kind of targeting those companies and making sure that we put a ban on them really like we do cigarettes. It's no different."

**Interview with healthcare professional BB, 29 February 2024**

## 2. There is easy access to vapes for young people in Haringey.

Many participants across both the focus groups and interviews noted just how easy it was to get vapes.

One pupil stated:

“...they're so cheap. Yeah... Like on our local corner shop, [it's] £3.99 for like one. Yeah...on my local corner shop like down the road.”

**Focus group at school C, 7 March 2024**

One of the school nurses we interviewed also referred to this:

“I'd say so, I think it's more readily available, as I said, there's shops everywhere that are selling vapes. There's no doubt that children under the age of 18 are able to get hold of them. You see the disposable ones on the floor everywhere. I'd say there has definitely been a massive increase in vaping...”

**Interview with healthcare professional BB, 29 February 2024**

### 3. Social media has played a role in the attraction and popularity of vaping among young people

Nearly all participants mentioned the impact that social media had on young people in the borough, which had significant impacts on their relationships with vaping.

"I've seen like videos of people raising awareness about like if they were vaping and then had a health issue like basically saying - this is what happened to me I was in hospital like you shouldn't vape..."  
"I think in a way it does help."

**Focus group at school A, 29 January 2024**

"There are bolts of pressure from social media. And I'll be scrolling just through, like my TikTok or through my Instagram, just looking for funny videos or updates on sport...And I'll see just somebody ... taking a puff and then just making like O's, like rings and then doing some next trick..."

**Focus group at school C, 7 March 2024**

At school B, teachers echoed similar concerns:

"Children talk a lot about Snapchat. They will send things to each other that look absolutely harmless."

"We know there are menus sent on Snapchat. They are like sweets, tapping into the inner child, what everybody likes."

**Interview with teachers at school B, 1 February 2024**

#### 4. Illicit vape sales are prevalent in Haringey and neighbouring boroughs.

One of the main insights from two focus groups in particular was that vapes were being sold to pupils in neighbouring boroughs.

“...once I was in Camden and I was about nine with my friend. And I was walking down the street and a guy on the opposite road just shouted asking me if I wanted a vape and I said that I was nine. Every time I walk past that road people try and call me over.”

**Focus group at school B, 1 February 2024**

“Also, there are just like people who, like, buy them in bulk and then like sell them off because I know for like my friend... she wanted like some Lost Mary or something. So she got her friend to go to Camden, who is of age to come and bring it up for her. It's all Camden. It's like it's easiest to get it in bulk from Camden, but then they take it into here.

**Focus group at school C, 7 March 2024**

“It's just like most commonly if you know someone who vapes, you'll be like, oh, like, why did you even get it? Oh, my friend got it. Where did your friend get it from? Oh, from Camden. And then they bring it here.”

**Focus group at school C, 7 March 2024**

## 5. Other substances are mixed into vapes, sometimes unbeknown to pupils.

One of the concerning findings from the focus groups was the prevalence of other substances being mixed into vapes and being consumed by pupils in Haringey.

One pupil noted:

“If its gonna become such a big problem with vapes then it needs to be regulated or made safe or something because if there are people buying the cheap ones that have got like spice in it, that's so much more dangerous. But if you're gonna keep this product on the market or whatever then make it safe.

**Focus group A, 29 January 2024**

One of the school nurses we interviewed also referred to this:

“We've been made aware of vapes being laced with other drugs and either young people knowing about that and readily smoking it or it's actually been put in there without the other person's knowledge or given to somebody without their knowledge.”

“So the young person thinking it's just a vape, it's a normal vape, and actually it's being laced with other drugs which are making them very unwell.”

“So it is a real concern and the problem is ... obviously its being done without these young people's knowledge so it's then very difficult to pinpoint what's actually happened when they get to A&E. Have they taken something else knowingly? Have they had alcohol? It's quite difficult to kind of pinpoint where its actually come from...”

**Interview with healthcare professional AA, 19 February 2024**

## 6. The role of the 'micro-spaces' of vaping at schools, where small communal spaces for privacy become 'contested spaces' between privacy and the vaping.

The function of toilets as being a micro-space for vaping in schools was noted by some pupils.

"Vaping is more accessible [than smoking], you can just go to the toilet like you don't have to go outside."

**Focus group at school A, 29 January 2024**

"Bathrooms, bathrooms always. Oh, we've got the bathrooms that... full stall. Yeah. Yeah. Like full coverage. Like, we've got the stone things and the door closes all the way, so, like, I don't think you could do anything in there."

"You know, when you go and it's a whole sauna, you know someone's been vaping but you don't know who it is."

**Focus group at school C, 7 March 2024**

Despite this, young people are aware of the environmental impacts of vaping in wider open spaces:

"Vapes are massive plastic waste with hazardous toxic batteries - thousands used a day lasting maybe a week and are not recycled at all..."

"...in the Congo, people have to mine cobalt to manufacture all these disposable vapes which has a negative impact on the environment and the population of a country."

**Focus Group at school B, 1 February 2024**

## 7. Better statutory joint-working is required.

Many of the teachers interviewed referenced the significance of increased joint-working in the borough to better challenge the spread of vaping.

However, teachers from school A were concerned about the lack of appropriate resources for schools and believed this could be improved.

“If maybe there was an actual kind of package... almost where you've got all this information, you can deliver it and you can deliver sessions on it.”

“Not just that it's a 120-minute assembly because once they leave they, you know, it goes in one ear and out the other. But maybe something like that, like a more in-depth kind of thing would be helpful.”

**Interview with teachers at school A, 29 January 2024**

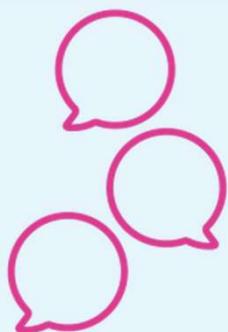
In a similar vein, one of the school nurses said:

“I think it is definitely minimal, and I definitely think that there needs to be more work done in schools and from parents as well and health professionals. You know I think it needs to be a collective health promotion around this and getting young people to understand the dangers of vaping and you know the health implications later in on.”

“But it needs to be a collective approach to that, and I think at the moment there isn't.”

**Interview with healthcare professional BB, 29 February 2024**

# Spotlight on survey responses



## Do you think vaping is a healthier option to smoking?

60% of pupils answered “yes” or “not sure”.

## What makes it hard to stop vaping?

48% of pupils answered the fact that it is “addictive” and 38% said they were influenced by friends or the social aspect.

## How often do you vape?

10% answered “every day”.

## Is it easy for you to buy vapes?

Only 38% of pupils answered “No”.



## Which platform is best for raising awareness on vaping?

54% of pupils answered “TikTok”.

## Do you think vaping is harmful to the environment?

55% agreed that vaping was harmful to the environment.

35% of pupils responded “Neutral” or “Not sure”.

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# Conclusion

Some of the key findings from this report have revealed that the relationship that young people have with vaping is linked to their environmental and social surroundings. From seeing vapes and other children on buses, social media, at corner shops, in the home or even scattered across the floor - young people would have a harder time going somewhere and not seeing a vape in and around Haringey

Whilst the long-term effects of vaping are yet to be seen, there are studies which demonstrate the short-term harms of vaping usage. Most commonly this has had an impact on respiratory issues and pupils reported it exasperating other illnesses such as tonsillitis.

# Appendix



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# Young people and vaping: survey

1. This survey is voluntary and is about vaping among young people in Haringey. The survey has been designed by Healthwatch Haringey, who are working on this project with Public Health Haringey. This survey is anonymous and anything to identify is not recorded, in line with GDPR.

Are you happy to continue with this survey?

Yes

No

2. Which school do you attend?

Hornsey School for Girls / Fortismere / Heartlands/ Park View /

Other/ Prefer Not to Say

3. How long have you been at this school?

Under 1 year

Between 1 to 2 years

More than 3 years

Prefer not to say

4. Do you vape?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

5. How often do you vape?

Everyday

A few times a week

Once a week

Hardly

Never

6. How long have you been vaping?

Over a year

Under a year

Prefer not to say

7. If you do vape, what flavours do you like?

8. Did you smoke cigarettes before you started vaping?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

9. Do you think vaping is a healthier option to smoking?

Yes

No

Not sure

10. Did your friends get you into vaping?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

11. Is it easy for you to buy vapes?

Yes

No

Not sure

12. Would you like to stop vaping?

Yes

No

Not sure

13. Do you smoke anything else?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

14. Do you think vaping is harmful to the environment?

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Not sure

15. What makes it hard to stop vaping?

Friends

Addictive

Social aspect

Something else (please explain)

16. Which platform is best for raising awareness on vaping?

Snapchat

Tiktok

X / Twitter

Facebook

YouTube

Something else (please explain)



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