



HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme
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Deputy Thomas Pringle,
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By email to thomas.pringle@oireachtas.ie

7th March 2023

Ref: PQ 8227/23

To ask the Minister for Health his plans for population wide education and health awareness on the use of e-cigarettes and or similar products; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Pringle,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above referenced Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health. The question concerned was referred to Strategy and Research, HSE, for review and direct response as the work of the Tobacco Free Ireland Programme (TFIP) is part of that function.

The TFIP is the HSE vehicle through which the actions identified for the HSE in the Department of Health *Tobacco Free Ireland* Strategy (2013) are implemented across the health services. The Programme falls under the governance of Strategy and Research in the HSE (in 2017 the TFIP was part of the former Health and Wellbeing Division of the HSE). Currently, there is no allocated funding or planned mass media campaign to provide population wide education and awareness on the use of e-cigarettes or similar products. The HSE will prioritise an e-cigarette awareness campaign if commissioned to do so.

The QUIT campaign was the first national mass media social marketing campaign for smoking that was funded by the HSE. Initially, this was the *1 in Every 2* campaign. The QUIT campaign fronted by *Gerry Collins* was launched in 2014. The *I Will Survive* TV ads (developed in 2016) began airing in 2017 followed by *The Last Stop* which began airing in January 2020. The latest iteration of the campaign, *Take Back Control*, was developed in 2022 and has been airing since January 2023. The QUIT campaign serves to direct smokers to evidence based stop smoking services (ether face-to-face or phone based support is available).

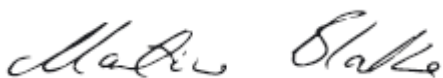
The European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD)¹ reports that more students report using e-cigarettes in 2019 than in 2015, and the use of e-cigarettes among students is now more common than cigarette smoking. Almost 4 in 10 students (39%) had tried e-cigarettes and almost 1 in 5 (18%) were current users, making both ever-use and current use of e-cigarettes higher than use of combustible cigarettes (32% had tried smoking, 14% current users, with 5% reporting daily smoking). Furthermore, a Health Research Board Evidence Review² in 2020 reported that adolescents who use e-cigarettes are three to five times more likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes compared to those who never used e-cigarettes.

The HSE has developed new units of learning for the SPHE Junior Cycle curriculum which contain lessons on e-cigarettes and nicotine delivery systems. These lessons are currently under review as part of the overall review of the SPHE curriculum.

Ireland's first National Stop Smoking Clinical Guideline³ was published in January 2022. This guideline was prioritised and quality assured by the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee, Department of Health, and recommended by the Minister of Health to become part of a suite of National Clinical Guidelines for implementation across the health services in Ireland. The Guideline advises clinicians of the following:

- E-cigarettes are consumer products. There is some regulation in place to protect consumers of e-cigarettes but not the same quality and safety system as would be in place for a licensed drug or medical device.
- People who do not smoke or use e-cigarettes should not start.
- For people who smoke and want to quit, advise them that there are a range of recommended and accessible support options with well-established effectiveness and safety profiles.

I hope this information is of assistance to you. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.



Martina Blake

National Lead, HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme

¹ European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs: ESPAD 2019 Ireland. Tobacco Free Research Institute for the Department of Health.

² Electronic cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking initiation in adolescents – an evidence review (2020). Health Research Board.

³National Clinical Guideline No. 28: Stop Smoking Full Report