



HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme
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Deputy Colm Burke,
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By email to colm.burke@oireachtas.ie

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Ref: PQ 16141/25

To ask the Minister for Health if State supports for those looking to quit nicotine inhaling products, such as e-cigarettes and vapes are being considered; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Burke,

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 HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme works to coordinate and lead tobacco control activity across the health services to ensure implementation of the HSE actions contained within the Government Tobacco Free Ireland strategy. The Programme currently sits within HSE Health & Wellbeing which has recently moved under the governance of HSE Access & Integration.

According to the Healthy Ireland Survey Report (2024)¹, 17% of the Irish population are current smokers. Smoking rates have remained static since 2021.

8% of the population (increased from 4% in 2021) report currently using e-cigarettes with a further 13% reporting they have tried them in the past but no longer use them. E-cigarette use is highest among younger people, with 17% of 15-24 year olds reporting that they use them either daily or occasionally. This has grown from 14% in 2021.

¹ Healthy Ireland Survey 2024 Summary Report. Department of Health.
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/313378/4ea7ec06-47e4-40b6-b8a9-c92984d9022e.pdf#page=null>

Data collected in 2022 demonstrates that among children, 13% of 12 to 17 year olds report that they have used e-cigarettes in the last 30 days. This has grown from 9% in 2018.²

The HSE provides safe, effective and clinically sound stop smoking services, which are free and easy to access across the country. These services have been designed for people who smoke cigarettes (tobacco) and incorporate behavioural support (provided by a trained HSE stop smoking advisor) and access to free stop smoking medicines (nicotine replacement therapy).

Good stop smoking care is a life-saving healthcare intervention. The HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme, along with representatives from stop smoking services, pharmacy, clinical practice and patient representatives, led the development of the *National Clinical Guideline No. 28 – Stop Smoking*³ under the governance of the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee. Since its approval by the Minister for Health and publication in 2022, the Programme has worked with relevant stakeholders to promote the guideline and to implement its key recommendations across the health services in Ireland.

The National Stop Smoking Clinical Guideline summarises three simple evidence-based steps for healthcare professionals:

- 1. ASK** every patient about tobacco use and record smoking status at every visit,
- 2. ADVISE** on the risks of smoking, the benefits of quitting and the most effective ways of quitting,
- 3. ACT** by referring the patient to HSE Stop Smoking Services for behavioural support to stop smoking, and arrange or prescribe that the patient uses recommended stop smoking medicines in their quit attempt.

The recommended 1st line stop smoking medicines include Varenicline, alone or in combination with a Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) product. If Varenicline is unsuitable, then, combination NRT treatment (typically a long-lasting patch with a short-acting oral product) should be recommended.

This clinical guideline is specific to interventions to help people to stop using conventional tobacco products.

While it is possible that these supports may also help those people who wish to stop vaping, research is on-going to establish safe and effective services to help people stop vaping.

A full review and update of *National Clinical Guideline No. 28 – Stop Smoking* is planned for 2026. While this review and update will consider for inclusion new stop smoking medicines that have recently entered the Irish market, it will also need to re-examine e-cigarettes, and this examination will be best conducted following a refresh of the national Tobacco Free Ireland Strategy which is scheduled by the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Unit (DoH) in 2025, in which the HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme will participate.

² The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study 2022. University of Galway.
<https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/healthpromotionresearchcentre/hbscdocs/nationalreports/HBSC-2022-National-Report.pdf>

³ National Clinical Guideline No.28: Stop Smoking. Department of Health.
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4828b-stop-smoking/>

The HSE has not currently been resourced to establish a dedicated stop vaping service. If the HSE is to establish services to help people to stop vaping, this will require resourcing (i.e. staffing, IT capability, research and training).

Over 20,300 people attended a HSE stop smoking service in 2024. Stop smoking services are currently at capacity. Our stop smoking advisors do sometimes provide behavioural support to people who come to the service to stop vaping (where capacity allows), but are not currently able to provide access to free nicotine replacement therapy as the budget provided for this is specific to stop smoking care.

The establishment of a dedicated stop vaping service to be provided by the State will require:

- 1) A policy decision to provide stop vaping support by the Minister and Department of Health
- 2) The prioritisation and subsequent funding of research to help underpin the development of such a service and investment for staffing, appropriate medicines and other costs associated with establishing the service (IT development of the current QUIT Manager system, training etc.).

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

Yours sincerely,

Martina Blake

National Lead, HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme