

## E-cigarette Briefing for Health & Social Care Professionals

### 1. The Context

- 1.1 Smoking is the largest single cause of premature deaths and preventable ill-health in England. In 2011 among adults aged 35 and over there were around 79,100 deaths (18% of all deaths of adults aged 35 and over) estimated to be caused by smoking. The same report estimated that 36% (22,500) of all deaths due to respiratory diseases, and 28% (37,400) of all cancer deaths were attributable to smoking<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 One in two long-term smokers die prematurely as a result of smoking, half of these in middle age. On average, each smoker loses 16 years of life and experiences many more years of ill-health than a non-smoker<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3 In Blackpool, there are over 400 smoking related deaths (around a quarter of all deaths in Blackpool) and 2,125 smoking related hospital admissions every year. Annual costs to Blackpool's health service associated with smoking-related illness are estimated to exceed £7m each year with an additional £744,000 spent on treatment as a result of secondhand smoke (SHS)<sup>3</sup>.
- 1.4 The estimated cost from lost productivity (smoking breaks) in Blackpool is £23m each year as well as £9m lost productivity from early deaths and £3m from sick days. In 2013/14, smokers in Blackpool paid approximately £28.8m in duty on tobacco products<sup>4</sup>.

### 2. What are e-cigarettes?

- 2.1 Electronic cigarettes – commonly known as e-cigarettes – are novel nicotine delivery devices that were developed in China more than 10 years ago (also known as vapourisers or electronic nicotine delivery systems).
- 2.2 E-cigarettes are battery operated devices that aim to simulate combustible cigarettes. They do not contain tobacco but operate by heating nicotine and other chemicals, including propylene glycol and glycerol, into a vapour that is inhaled.
- 2.3 There are three main types of electronic cigarettes or vapourisers:
  - Disposable products (non-rechargeable)
  - An electronic cigarette kit that is rechargeable with replaceable pre-filled cartridges
  - An electronic cigarette that is rechargeable and has a tank or reservoir which has to be filled with liquid, often containing nicotine
- 2.4 Currently e-cigarettes are unregulated and unlicensed.

**3. What is the current national position in relation to e-cigarettes?**

- 3.1 Public Health England has recently released a statement which states that e-cigarettes are “*significantly less harmful than smoking*” and the headline “*that e-cigarettes are 95% safer than tobacco cigarettes*”. They also asked that we acknowledge them as a popular quit aid for those wishing to give up smoking.
- 3.2 They committed to continue to study the long term effects of e-cigarettes and be mindful of the large variety of e-cigarettes out in the community, which are currently unlicensed and unregulated.
- 3.3 The public health opportunity with e-cigarettes is in helping smokers to quit and in order to work with this trend, local Stop Smoking Services must be accessible and open to those using e-cigarettes and support all individuals who wish to quit their addiction to nicotine. This approach will combine a popular method of quitting (e-cigarettes) with the most effective way to quit (Stop Smoking Services).

**4. Blackpool Council’s response to Public Health England report; “E-cigarette: an evidence update” released 19<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

- 4.1 The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended that “*Until such time as a given electronic nicotine delivery system is deemed safe and effective and of acceptable quality by a competent national regulatory body, consumers should be strongly advised not to use any of these products, including electronic cigarettes.*”<sup>5</sup>
- 4.2 Blackpool Council supports this view and therefore cannot advocate the use of e-cigarettes until we are certain of their safety and efficacy.
- 4.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that e-cigarettes are highly likely to be less harmful than smoking, they are not harm-free. There will not be a full picture of their safety until they have been thoroughly assessed. The WHO and other researchers are concerned about the safety of the chemical combinations used across the variety of products available. These chemical combinations have not been evaluated for either short-term or long-term safety; and manufacturers have not fully disclosed the chemicals used<sup>5, 6&7</sup>
- 4.4 In line with the British Medical Association we feel that any health claims regarding e-cigarettes must be substantiated by robust independent evidence to ensure that consumers are correctly informed. There is as yet little evidence that using e-cigarettes is an effective way of quitting smoking, however there is strong evidence that using Nicotine Replacement Therapy products (for example Nicotine

patches or Nicotine gum) in combination with behavioural support from a specialist Stop Smoking Service is effective in quitting smoking.

- 4.5 In line with this, we are encouraging those who choose to use e-cigarettes to seek help from our local Stop Smoking Services.
- 4.6 The Public Health England report claims that there is no identified risk to bystanders of the vapour that comes from e-cigarettes; however long-term monitoring of the effects of exposure is not yet available.
- 4.7 The report also fails to cover the effects that e-cigarettes may have on the normalisation of smoking [e-cigarettes] amongst children and young people and how it may be acting as a gateway to smoking. Recent data from the Health and Social Care Information Centre shows that:

*Blackpool has the highest proportion of 15-year-olds who have ever used e-cigarettes at 33.9% compared to England average of 18.4%.*

- 4.8 Local data also highlights that e-cigarette use is prevalent in young people who have never smoked tobacco. Nearly three-quarters (72.6%) of young people surveyed who had tried e-cigarettes were non-smokers<sup>8</sup>. It is therefore of great concern to us locally that non-smokers are taking up use of e-cigarettes and there is evidence emerging that a proportion of these young people are progressing to smoking tobacco, which does not support the 'no evidence of gateway' statement within the Public Health England report. This is of concern given that nicotine use has been found to disrupt brain development in young people, which can have long-term, irreversible consequences on brain function.
- 4.9 E-cigarette companies are often owned by tobacco companies which are investing millions of pounds each year to market their products through press, television, radio, the internet and outdoor advertising<sup>9</sup>.

Strategies such as celebrity endorsement at high profile events e.g. Kate Moss at London Fashion Week, Lily Allen at the BRITS, Leonardo DiCaprio at the Golden Globes<sup>10</sup>; free gifts e.g. silver charm necklaces and clutch bags and new flavour varieties e.g. tiramisu, champagne and bubble-gum are all designed to increase product sales<sup>11</sup> and are appealing to young people.

We feel this marketing emulates very successful tobacco advertising. Both independent e-cigarette companies and tobacco company e-cigarette subsidiaries have engaged in marketing activities that can be interpreted as appealing to young people even if the company line is that this is not its intention.

## 5.0 Legislation

- 5.1 From May 2016, new laws will ban broadcast and press advertising of e-cigarettes unless they have received a license as a stop smoking medicine.
- 5.2 On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 it became illegal for retailers to sell electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) or e-liquids to someone under 18 and for adults to buy (or try to buy) tobacco products or e-cigarettes for someone under 18.
- 5.3 From May 2016, the nicotine concentration of e-cigarettes classed as consumer products will be regulated, with a maximum level of 20mg/ml. Products with higher nicotine levels will be licensed as over-the-counter medicines. There will also be limits to the size of containers, products will include a list of additives and also carry health warnings.

## **6.0 Smokefree Policy**

- 6.1 Blackpool Council's Smokefree Policy was amended in 2014 to include the use of electronic cigarettes (and nicotine devices that resemble cigarettes). The smokefree policy means that all Blackpool Council staff must not smoke or use e-cigarettes during working hours or whilst wearing a Blackpool Council uniform and/or an ID badge when on or off duty.
- 6.2 Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has also included e-cigarettes in their Smokefree Policy.
- 6.3 It is recommended that workplaces and other appropriate settings across Blackpool also adopt this stance. Blackpool Council is currently supporting local schools by providing a model smokefree policy template for the school setting. This support also includes the provision of smokefree signage for school grounds and staff training to support implementation of the policy.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

- 7.1 Blackpool Council's Director of Public Health recommends that health and social care professionals follow the WHO evidence and recommendations, as a precautionary approach for electronic cigarettes.

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- 7.2 In summary, the recommendations are that:

- Until such time that there is a product that is deemed safe, effective and of an acceptable quality (as assessed by a competent regulatory body E.g. MHRA), you should not promote and / or advocate e-cigarettes as a quit aid;
- Patients should be advised that there is a strong evidence base for using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products (for example Nicotine patches or Nicotine gum) in combination with behavioural support, from a specialist Stop Smoking Service, as by far the most effective way of quitting smoking. Individuals who are using e-cigarettes may still be addicted to nicotine and should be offered a referral to Stop Smoking Services;
- Quitting smoking completely and being addiction free is the best way to protect health. We know that this isn't easy but help is available. With support from a local stop smoking service you are **four times more likely** to quit than going it alone. They can help.



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Director of Public Health

**Local contact details for further information**

Specialist Stop Smoking Service

[www.smokefreelifeblackpool.com](http://www.smokefreelifeblackpool.com)

Tel: 01253 462463 or 0800 246 1576.

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## References

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