



Department of Health & Social Care

*From Neil O'Brien MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Primary Care and Public
Health*

Mr Steve Brine MP
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16 August 2023

Dear Steve

Thank you for your letter.

I share your concerns on the increasing prevalence of children vaping and welcome the suggestions the committee has put forward.

Despite being an effective tool to help adults quit smoking, vaping is not risk free and there are unknown risks on the long-term harms, especially for children.

Up until recently our regulations, such as age of sale and advertising restrictions, have been effective at keeping rates of youth vaping low. However, over the past two years vaping use amongst children has more than doubled. Recent data from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) shows that current use of vaping amongst 16- to 17-year-olds is 15%, which has increased from 5% in 2018.

To help address this issue, the Department of Health and Social Care, in collaboration with HM Treasury and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs launched a call for evidence on youth vaping in April. It explored a range of issues, including regulatory compliance, the marketing and promotion of vapes, the role of social media, the environmental impact and the vaping market (led by HMT). The call for evidence closed on 6th June and officials across the three Departments have been working closely together to analyse the submissions.

We are carefully considering all possible measures, including on duties, packaging and marketing, and will publish the Government's response in the coming weeks.

To help support enforcement activity, the Department has also funded a new £3 million vaping unit, led by National Trading Standards, to tackle illegal and underage vape sales. Learning from Operation CeCe on illicit tobacco, the new programme will bolster enforcement and training capacity in Trading Standards, to help share knowledge and intelligence across the country, undertake test purchasing and testing of products, and disrupt illicit supply.

In May, the Prime Minister announced new plans to address youth vaping that builds on those mentioned above, which include:

1. Closing the loophole in our laws which allows vaping companies to give free samples of vapes to under 18s.
2. Writing to police forces to ensure dedicated school liaison officers across the country are using new resources available to keep illegal vapes out of schools.
3. Reviewing the rules on selling nicotine-free vapes to under 18s to ensure our rules keep pace with how vapes are being used.
4. Reviewing the rules on issuing fines to shops selling vapes to under 18s to allow local Trading Standards to issue on the spot fines and fixed penalty notices more easily.

Lastly, we have also been working hard to increase the training resources and support for teachers and schools. In October 2022, we published new content on the potential risks of vaping for young people on the FRANK and Better Health websites and we have provided input to educational resources produced by partners including the PSHE Association. We are also developing a new resource pack for schools on vaping, intended for children aged 11-13, which will be added to the Schools Zone web platform in time for the 2023/34 academic year. The PSHE Association has lesson plans on drugs, alcohol and tobacco which include a small amount of content on e-cigarettes and vaping. In 2022, the PSHA association published a new vaping lesson plan for Year 9. It is planned to include more content on e-cigarettes and vaping in the drugs, alcohol and tobacco lesson plans when they are next updated.

Thank you again for your support. Once published, I will send the committee the government's response to address the rise in youth vaping.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil O'Brien', with a stylized, flowing script.

NEIL O'BRIEN MP