

Stopping tobacco smoking and youth vaping

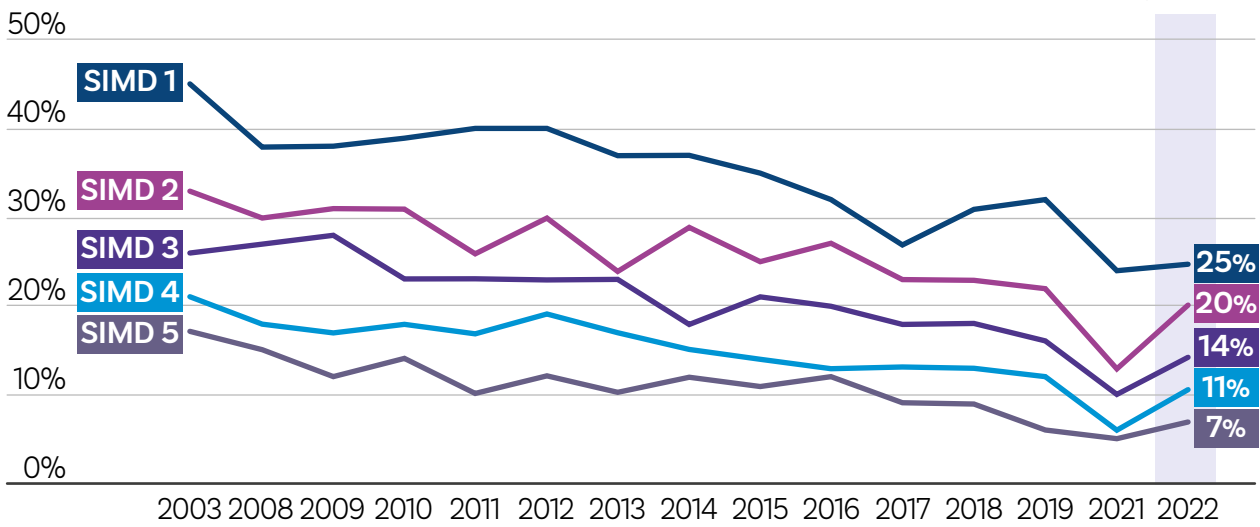
A position statement on behalf of the Scottish Public Health System

March 2024

Scale of the problem

There were over 8,000 smoking-related deaths in Scotland in 2022 ([ScotPHO, 2022](#)). Smoking is a major cause of health inequalities in Scotland. People living in the most deprived communities are almost four times more likely to smoke than those living in other areas.

Current cigarette smoking prevalence (age-standardised), 2003 to 2022, by area deprivation.



Survey year

Scottish Health Survey, 2022

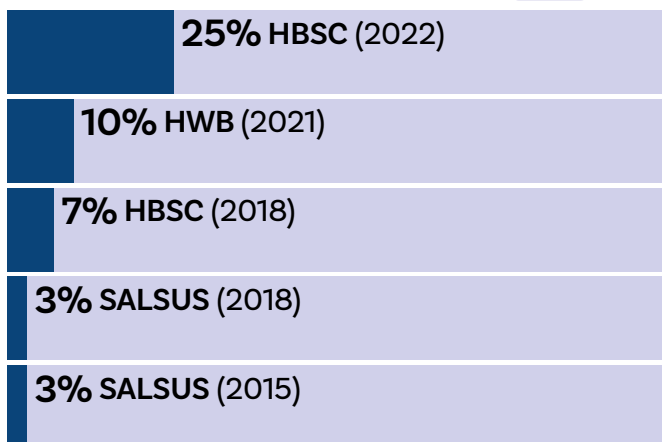
Smoking causes cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung diseases, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and early death ([ScotPHO, 2022](#)). Smoking during pregnancy is the leading modifiable risk factor for poor birth outcomes, significantly increasing the risk of preterm birth, stillbirth and death in the first year of life ([RCOG, 2023](#)).

Smoking causes:



The prevalence of youth vaping has risen rapidly. In 2022, 25% of 15-year-olds reported having used a vape in the last 30 days compared to just 7% in 2018 (HBSC, 2022, 2018). Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is addictive, and some research shows that they can be a gateway to smoking (Scottish Government, 2024). Furthermore, the negative long-term impacts of vaping are not yet clear. Health professionals in Scotland have raised health concerns about vaping in children and young people. There is no public health benefit to young people vaping and e-cigarettes are not products for children.

Children aged 15 years reporting having used an e-cigarette in the last 30 days



HBSC = Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study. HWB = Health and Wellbeing Census Scotland. SALSUS = Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey

Scotland has a strong track record of world-leading public health policy that has saved tens of thousands of lives. We have it within our power to stop tobacco smoking and youth vaping. We need to act quickly to protect children from the harm of tobacco and related products.

Recent policy developments

The UK, Scottish and Welsh governments and the Northern Ireland Executive have recently announced new measures to protect children and young people from the harm caused by smoking and vaping (Department of Health and Social Care, 2023). In addition, in 2023 the Scottish Government launched its ‘Tobacco and vaping framework: roadmap to 2034’ (Scottish Government, 2023). It also identifies the need for clear and targeted action on smoking cessation and youth vaping.

This requires:

- concerted action to deliver evidence-based smoking cessation services targeted to need
- clear guidance on the potential role of e-cigarettes as a tool to support adult smoking cessation
- strong regulation of vaping products to stop young people using them.

Areas for action

We welcome the new announcements by the UK Government, Scottish Government and other devolved administrations. We also recognise that more needs to be done to stop tobacco smoking and youth vaping. Below we propose six areas for collective action:

1 Price

Research shows that the tobacco industry keeps the price of its cheapest cigarettes artificially low to encourage smoking initiation and maintenance ([Gilmore et al, 2013](#)). In addition, e-cigarettes are cheap. The importance of product price is recognised by the UK and Scottish governments. One option that could be considered is the introduction of a minimum price for e-cigarettes and a higher minimum price for tobacco.

2 Availability, inequalities and environment

Tobacco and e-cigarettes can be purchased in retailers all around Scotland. Restricting the availability of these products needs consideration. Measures could include a licence fee for those shops that sell tobacco and e-cigarettes.

Smoking cessation remains one of the most cost-effective interventions to improve health and reduce inequalities. Evidence-based services need to be easily accessible in our most deprived communities with widespread integration of smoking cessation into clinical pathways.

E-cigarettes cause health and environmental damage. Disposable e-cigarettes should be banned from general sale.

3 Promotion

Significant progress has been achieved in restricting the promotion of tobacco. We support government proposals for plain packaging for e-cigarettes. E-cigarettes are advertised widely in our communities and online. E-cigarette advertising could be banned nationally and locally to reduce their appeal.

4 Resilience and positive attitudes

Work needs to be done locally with youth groups and communities, particularly in our more deprived areas, to build resilience and grow positive attitudes and foster choices that keep children away from e-cigarettes, tobacco and related products.

5 Control

We recognise that more needs to be done to control the sale of e-cigarettes to children. Trading Standards services require additional resources to support enforcement work. New fines and penalties could be considered to dissuade retailers from selling e-cigarettes to children.

6 Prevention

Nicotine dependency in pregnancy affects over 6,000 babies who are exposed to tobacco through maternal smoking, many of whom may also be subsequently exposed to second-hand smoke in the home. Prioritising effective smoking cessation for pregnant women and family members is a priority.

Education and skills development settings should provide information about e-cigarettes for children. This should be incorporated into substance misuse and risk-taking behaviour strategies, making it clear that they are illegal.