

Smoking Tobacco

Why do young people smoke?

Most young people in England do not smoke. In fact, only about two per cent of young people aged 11 to 15 years old are regular smokers¹, with most starting before the age of 18. The reasons that children start smoking are complex but having other family members who smoke increases the likelihood of a child becoming a smoker.

Smoking is often associated with other risk factors such as drinking and substance misuse.

Each cigarette contains over 4,000 substances, 69 of which are known to cause cancer. This [video](#), Chemical Soup produced by Hampshire County Council, shows some of the chemicals found in cigarettes and explains why they are added.

Nicotine, found in cigarettes, is highly addictive. Whilst most young people may not initially feel addicted to smoking, they can very easily become hooked over a short period of time. Even young smokers may need behavioural or pharmacological support to stop smoking (for example, nicotine replacement therapy, such as patches or gum).

It is illegal to sell cigarettes to any person under the age of 18 and the UK has a variety of laws to protect young people from the promotion and advertising of tobacco.

Breathing in other people's smoke, known as 'second-hand smoke', can also be harmful, especially to children. To protect people, it is illegal to smoke in all enclosed public places in the UK. It is also illegal to smoke in a vehicle if a person under 18 years old is present.

What are the impacts?

Smoking is one of the biggest causes of death and illness in the UK. It is known to directly cause seven out of 10 cases of lung cancer and puts you at risk of at least 50 other serious health conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke and pneumonia².

For young people who have just started smoking, the health impacts may not at first be apparent. However, as well as the obvious risk of long-term addiction, young smokers are also more susceptible to coughs, shortness of breath and wheeziness. They are more likely to be absent from school with illness. Smoking can impair lung growth, which will affect them in later life¹.

Smoking can also affect appearance through the discolouration of teeth, fingers and the premature aging of skin. It can also exacerbate existing conditions such as eczema, psoriasis and teenage acne.

For young smokers who are addicted to nicotine, they may become irritable, unable to concentrate or fidgety after long periods without smoking. This may impact their behaviour and attitude in school.

Most young smokers try their first cigarette with their friends. A smoker's sense of smell and taste is often impaired, so they may not realise how strongly they smell of smoke. To a non-smoking person, however, the smell is easily recognisable.

How to talk to young people about smoking

Finding out that your young person smokes may be a shock. Parents might feel angry or upset. However, it is important that the subject is approached in a calm and supportive way. It is very likely that the young person will quit soon and even if they don't stop immediately, talking about the effects and different ways to quit will help for the future.

The [‘My School Aged Child Smokes’ factsheet](#) talks about how to discuss smoking with a young person.

When talking to young people about smoking it is often good to look at impacts of tobacco that are not related to health and sometimes important to young people. Information is available on [smoking in the media](#), [smoking and the environment](#) and the [impact of smoking on developing countries](#).

The reasons given by young people for trying cigarettes are most commonly associated with peer pressure. However, children who smoke regularly also report doing so because they feel it helps them to cope with stress and anxiety. Getting support with these underlying issues may also be beneficial.

Where can I get local advice and support?

No Limits - provide information, advice and counselling through a range of services. [Click here](#) or email SPL@nolimitshelp.org.uk.

Smokefree Hampshire - Children aged 12 or above can receive support from its [Stop Smoking Service](#) to quit smoking. This service offers free and confidential support from specialist stop smoking advisers, with access to medications such as nicotine replacement patches and gum. Children can access the service independently or with the support of an adult. Support is available face to face or by telephone.

[Click here](#) or call the Quitline on 01264 563039 or text Quit to 66777.

Where can I get more advice from national resources?

<i>Link and /or QR code</i>	<i>Description</i>
Fact Sheets - ASH	A variety of factsheets from Action On Smoking and Health (ASH) .

Quit smoking - Better Health - NHS	National NHS information and links to free quit smoking apps.
Anonymous Reporting Keep It Out	Keep it Out provides information on illegal tobacco and how to report it anonymously.

¹ [190913-ASH-Factsheet Youth-Smoking.pdf](#)

² [What are the health risks of smoking? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)