
e-cigarettes

Summary

- E-cigarettes simulate the act of smoking, but you don't burn tobacco when you use them. An e-cigarette is a battery-powered device that heats liquid into a vapour, which you then inhale into your lungs.
 - Inhaling vapour from an e-cigarette is known as 'vaping'. When smoking an e-cigarette, the user inhales and exhales the vapour, which can look similar to cigarette smoke.
 - The liquid used in e-cigarettes may or may not contain nicotine.
 - In Victoria, it is generally illegal to sell, possess or use liquid containing nicotine in an e-cigarette.
 - E-cigarette liquid which does not contain nicotine can be legally sold, possessed and used in Victoria (as long as it does not contain any other illegal ingredients).
 - E-cigarettes cannot be used in areas where smoking is banned, cannot be displayed at retailer outlets, and cannot be sold to people under 18 years of age.
 - E-cigarettes cannot be used in outdoor dining areas.
 - The full health impacts of e-cigarettes are not yet known, however potential dangers include faulty parts, potentially flammable lithium batteries and ingestion (swallowing) of e-liquid which can lead to poisoning and even death in children.
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Electronic cigarettes – or e-cigarettes – simulate the act of smoking, but you don't burn tobacco when you use them. Instead, the e-cigarette is a battery-powered device that works by heating liquid into an aerosol, which you then inhale into your lungs.

That aerosol is often called 'vapour', and inhaling it from an e-cigarette is known as 'vaping'. When smoking an e-cigarette, the user inhales and exhales the vapour, which can look similar to cigarette smoke.

The liquid used in e-cigarettes may or may not contain nicotine.

In Victoria, it is generally illegal to sell, possess or use liquid containing nicotine in an e-cigarette. On the other hand, liquid which does not contain nicotine can be legally sold, possessed and used in Victoria (as long as it does not contain any other illegal ingredients).

But be aware that liquid might not be labelled properly. Even though it is illegal to sell liquid containing nicotine in Victoria, there is no guarantee that liquid labelled as 'non-nicotine' (or that does not list nicotine as an ingredient) will not contain nicotine. Incorrect labelling is dangerous and illegal, but it does happen.

In New South Wales, tests of e-liquid samples collected by NSW Health in 2013 showed that 70 per cent of samples contained high levels of nicotine, even though the label did not list nicotine as an ingredient. Testing in Tasmania found similar results.

Liquid used in e-cigarettes comes in a range of flavours, such as fruit, chocolate and confectionary flavours.

E-cigarettes are often shaped and coloured to look like cigarettes, cigars or cigarillos. They can also come in other shapes and colours, and can look like other everyday items such as pens or memory sticks.

They can also be known as e-cigars, e-pipes, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), alternative nicotine delivery systems (ANDS), e-shishas, e-hookas, hookah-pens, vape-pipes and e-cigs. They can be disposable, or reusable.

E-cigarettes have gained in popularity in Australia and worldwide over the past few years, primarily among existing smokers.

Are e-cigarettes a good way to give up smoking?

Some people argue that e-cigarettes can be used to help people to stop smoking, but we don't know how effective or safe they are.

The **Therapeutic Goods Administration** (TGA) has not approved any e-cigarette products as a medicine to help people quit smoking. This is because the quality and safety of e-cigarettes has not yet been thoroughly tested, and it is not clear whether they are actually helpful for people trying to quit.

As e-cigarettes have not been approved by the TGA, it is illegal to market or promote e-cigarettes as a product that can help people to quit smoking.

However, the TGA does endorse many other products proven to help people quit smoking, based on their safety and long-term effectiveness. These **products include**:

- nicotine patches
- nicotine gum, oral strips and lozenges
- nicotine mouth spray and inhalators
- medications such as Champix or Zyban.

You can get some of these products at a reduced price with a prescription from your doctor.

What are the dangers of e-cigarettes?

E-cigarettes are likely to be less harmful to your health than regular cigarettes, but their full health impacts are not yet known.

Potential dangers of e-cigarettes include:

- **ingestion (swallowing) of e-liquid – which can lead to poisoning and even death when swallowed by children**
- faulty parts – there have been some reports of explosions
- lithium batteries – these can be flammable or explosive if used in low-quality devices.

The products you can buy in Australia are made up of many parts, which can come from all over the world. So it's difficult to assess the safety and quality of every facet of the products.

What we do know is that products that involve delivering chemicals to the lung are usually only approved after an extensive safety and efficacy evaluation. As mentioned above, e-cigarettes have not been tested and approved as safe or effective by the TGA. This means that the safety of e-cigarettes cannot be guaranteed.

Health experts are also concerned about the various chemical ingredients used in e-cigarette liquids. Even though it is illegal to sell liquid containing nicotine in Victoria, there is no guarantee that liquid purchased will not contain nicotine. Unfortunately, the incorrect labelling of liquids used in e-cigarettes has been known to happen in Australia.

Liquid used in e-cigarettes also often contains other chemicals (such as flavourings) which may be harmful when inhaled, even though they might be safe when added to food.

The particle matter (PM) that is emitted by e-cigarettes could be potentially dangerous to those who inhale it, just as passive smoking is harmful to those who share a contained space with regular smokers. Inhaling PM can lead to asthma attacks and heart disease.

What does the law say about e-cigarettes?

The **Tobacco Amendment Act 2016** amends the Tobacco Act 1987 to regulate all e-cigarettes in the same way as tobacco products.

Under the Act e-cigarettes cannot be used in areas where smoking is banned, cannot be displayed at retailer outlets, and cannot be sold to people under 18 years of age, as well as being subject to other restrictions.

Smoking e-cigarettes is banned in outdoor dining areas of cafes, footpath dining, restaurants and pubs, food fairs, community and street festivals.

In most cases, it is against the law to sell, possess or use an e-cigarette containing nicotine in Victoria (although there are some very specific exceptions to this).

It is also illegal to buy e-cigarettes containing nicotine from overseas and bring them into the country, unless you meet a number of special legal requirements (including having a prescription from an Australian doctor).

Sale, possession and use of non-nicotine e-cigarettes is legal in **Victoria** (as long as the liquid used in the e-cigarette does not contain any other illegal ingredients).

Retailers are not permitted to display e-cigarettes in retail outlets or sell them to anyone under the age of 18.

What do the experts say?

The **Cancer Council Australia** and the **Heart Foundation Australia** both recommend restricting sales of non-nicotine e-cigarettes, extending smoke-free laws to include e-cigarettes, and banning e-cigarette advertising.

They also consider that e-cigarettes, with their fruit and confectionary flavours, are clearly marketed to young people. They are concerned about this situation, because the short and long-term health risks of e-cigarettes are still unknown.

Where to get help

- Your GP
- **Quitline**. Tel. 13 7848, Monday to Friday, 8 am–8 pm
- **Quit**

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