

## Curriculum Toolkit for Teachers and Learners in Wales

Substances and addiction:

# Tobacco and Nicotine use in young people

# Introduction

**This toolkit has been co-constructed with teachers for use with learners aged nine and above. It should be used flexibly to meet the identified needs of your learners within the context of your school.**

This toolkit focuses on smoking and nicotine use in young people as a key theme within the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience and can be used alongside the Vaping toolkit. Teaching and learning about health harming behaviours, substance misuse and addiction can address key concepts within the Health and Well-being AoLE and should link to all statements of what matters within this AoLE, where possible. In particular, **Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits** and **Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others**.

Learning about smoking and nicotine use in young people will support learners to develop a common set of critical appraisal, decision-making and risk assessment skills enabling learners to respond effectively to a range of substance misuse issues, including new or emerging substances learners (and teachers) may not have encountered yet.

## You should consider...

- Whether the content of these resources are developmentally appropriate for your learners
- The appropriateness of the content of the resources and its relevance to *your* learners in *your* context
- How this resource may support prior learning for smoking and nicotine use in young people

# How this Toolkit is organised

**Teacher guidance** is designed to support classroom teachers plan and prepare lessons on the topic of tobacco and nicotine use in young people.

It includes:

- Curriculum for Wales links
- Why this learning is needed
- Important key messages
- Overviews of the knowledge banks and classroom activities
- Sources of further information to support teaching and learning.

Teachers should make themselves familiar with this guidance prior to planning for delivery.

**Teacher Knowledge Banks** are a professional learning tool which provide teachers with the key background knowledge and understanding about the topic of tobacco and nicotine use in young people linking with the big questions to inform their curriculum design. They include why this topic is important for learners' health and well-being.

**Classroom activities** are suggestions to support teaching and learning in relation to the health topic. They provide a hook to engage learners in critical thinking, discussion and deepening understanding. They should be used flexibly and can be adapted to meet the identified needs of learners.

# Why this learning is needed

Wales has made huge strides in reducing the overall prevalence of smoking among adults. The current adult smoking rate stands at just 10.4%, representing roughly one in ten adults. This figure marks the lowest rate recorded since records began and signifies a drop of more than 50% since 2011, continuing a strong downward trend. (Welsh Government. National Survey for Wales, 2025)

The news is even better for current school-aged children, where smoking rates are very low. Approximately 3% of pupils in Years 7–11 (ages 11–16) currently smoke, rising slightly to 7% for Years 12–13. The percentage of pupils who have "ever tried smoking" remains below 10% for most secondary students, indicating that the preventative messages delivered so far are highly effective in discouraging initial experimentation. Public Health Wales / ASH Wales (2023) This reinforces the importance of sustaining these educational efforts to maintain the downward trajectory and ensure the next generation remains largely smoke-free.

Despite the falling rates, the health impact of historical and current smoking remains a substantial burden on NHS Wales. Smoking is the cause of approximately 3,845 deaths per year among adults aged 35+, accounting for over 10% of all deaths in that age group and necessitates around 17,000 annual hospital admissions. Critically, this burden is not shared equally. There is a profound link between deprivation and smoking, creating stark health inequalities: smoking-related deaths and hospital admissions are nearly three times higher in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived.



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Resources are organised in Teacher knowledge banks linked to each 'Big Question'. These questions can, and should, be posed to learners as a vehicle for curriculum delivery.

| Big questions                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Knowledge bank                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Links to statements of what matters                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>What are the personal impacts of smoking?</b><br>Addiction, health harms, chemical/toxins, nicotine                                                                                                          | Health effects and risks of tobacco and nicotine – the physical, mental and long-term health impacts<br><br>How tobacco and nicotine use effects your emotional and mental well-being<br><br>Quitting, support and health promotion | <b>Health and Well-being</b><br><b>Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits</b> – health promoting and health harming behaviours<br><b>Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others</b> – decision-making and assessing risk<br><b>How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being</b> - Recognise how different groups can influence |
| <b>Why do people smoke?</b><br>Curiosity and experimentation, peer influence and social norms, stress and coping mechanism, family influence, media and marketing, addiction                                    | Behaviour, choice and influence<br><br>Understanding tobacco and nicotine – what these substances are and how they work                                                                                                             | <b>Humanities</b><br><b>Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs</b> – governance (rules), cause and effect<br><b>Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action</b> - inequality, choices and decision-making                                                                                    |
| <b>What are the societal impacts of smoking?</b><br>Health inequalities, economic costs, healthcare burden, impacts on education and employment, environmental damage, social relationships, generational cycle | The social and environmental impact<br><br>Laws, regulation and industry influence<br><br>Smoking data and statistics                                                                                                               | <b>Science and Technology</b><br><b>The world around us is full of living things which depend on each other for survival</b> -an understanding of the factors which affect our health allows us to make informed decisions about our physical health                                                                                                                                                                                         |

# Supporting learners toward realisation of the four purposes

| Ambitious, capable learners<br>who:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Enterprising, creative<br>contributors who:                                                                                                                                                                                   | Ethical, informed citizens<br>who:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Healthy, confident<br>individuals who:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts</li> <li>can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about</li> <li>understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts</li> <li>undertake research and evaluate critically what they find</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to learn throughout their lives</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>think creatively to reframe and solve problems</li> <li>Express ideas and emotions through different media</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to play a full part in life and work</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views</li> <li>engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values</li> <li>understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting</li> <li>show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy</li> <li>know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well</li> <li>take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.</b></p> |

# Key messages for tobacco and nicotine use in young people

Anyone can become addicted to nicotine. While young people from all backgrounds are at risk, some face extra pressure due to stress, family members who smoke, mental health challenges or social influences.

Nicotine is a powerful drug that creates strong cravings and withdrawal symptoms, making it very difficult to quit once hooked.

Nicotine use impacts everyday function, potentially making it harder to concentrate in school or work, sleep well, manage stress and perform in sports or hobbies.

Desire to stop smoking is generally low among young people, with many thinking that they will quit at some point in the future and that stopping will be easy.

Only about 11% of young people aged 11–15 have ever even tried smoking. If someone does try it, though, there's a big risk: about half of those who experiment in their youth end up smoking as adults.

Smoking harms nearly every organ, including the heart, lungs, teeth and skin. Long-term use significantly increases the risk of cancer, heart disease and life-shortening illnesses.

Quitting smoking is possible but often difficult, typically requiring multiple attempts. Support from trained advisors or NRT (Nicotine Replacement Therapy) dramatically increases success rates. NRT (like patches or gum) is available and safe for people aged 12 and over.

Smoking doesn't just harm the person lighting up; it affects families, communities and the NHS. Treating all the smoking-related illnesses places a huge financial strain on health services.

# Knowledge Banks

| Knowledge Bank | Title                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1              | <b>Understanding tobacco and nicotine – what these substances are and how they work</b><br>Common tobacco and nicotine products, the difference between tobacco, nicotine and other substances |
| 2              | <b>Health effects and risks of tobacco and nicotine – the physical, mental and long-term health impacts</b><br>The short and long-term effects of smoking                                      |
| 3              | <b>How tobacco and nicotine use effects your emotional and mental well-being</b><br>Understanding the connection                                                                               |
| 4              | <b>The social and environmental impact</b><br>Social influence and inequality                                                                                                                  |
| 5              | <b>Behaviour, choice and influence</b><br>The reasons people take up tobacco, building refusal skills and critical thinking                                                                    |
| 6              | <b>Laws, regulation and industry influence</b><br>UK laws, marketing tactics                                                                                                                   |
| 7              | <b>Quitting, support and health promotion</b><br>How to quit safely, the benefits of stopping at any age                                                                                       |
| 8              | <b>Smoking data and statistics</b><br>Smoking rates among adults, teenagers and children in Wales                                                                                              |

# Classroom activities

| Classroom activity | Title                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                  | <b>Chemical soup</b><br>Enables learners to understand the ingredients of a cigarette and the effects they have on smokers.                                                                                  |
| 2                  | <b>How we are influenced</b><br>Informs learners of the techniques used by advertisers to sell products and services (Product placement and celebrity endorsements).                                         |
| 3                  | <b>Myth busters</b><br>Provides statements to challenge and disprove commonly believed myths regarding tobacco.                                                                                              |
| 4                  | <b>Smoker's body</b><br>Develops understanding of how smoking can affect different parts of the body (short and long-term).                                                                                  |
| 5                  | <b>The big debate</b><br>Provides statements to promote critical thinking and discussion about smoking and nicotine use in young people.                                                                     |
| 6                  | <b>The true cost of tobacco from field to filter</b><br>Supports learners to become familiar with the facts about the tobacco industry and how it impacts on the environment, producers, the public and NHS. |
| 7                  | <b>A Smokefree Generation: What Does It Mean for You?</b><br>Develops understanding of the Smokefree Generation law through discussion, myths and real-life scenarios.                                       |

## Teacher Resources:

### Sources of further information to support teaching and learning

#### **Ash Wales**

[ASH Wales: Working Towards a Smoke-Free Future - Action on Smoking and Health](#)

#### **Help me quit**

[Help Me Quit](#)

[Young people and stopping smoking](#)

[Your Quit Plan - Help Me Quit](#) online quit planning tool

[JUSTB smoke free programme - Public Health Wales](#) Year 8 smoking prevention programme, targeting schools with higher smoking rates

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