

**Subject:**

**Circular Number:**  
**2014/25**

**ENCOURAGING A SMOKE-FREE AND E-CIGARETTE  
FREE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS AND YOUTH  
ORGANISATIONS**

**Date of Issue:**  
**15 December 2014**

**Target Audience:**

- Boards of Governors and Principals of all grant-aided schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta;
- Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards;
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland;
- Teachers' Unions;
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland;
- Youth Organisations.

**Summary of Contents:**

This Circular encourages schools and youth organisations to extend the ban on smoking on school and youth premises to include a ban on the use of e-cigarettes.

**Governor Awareness:**  
Essential

**Status of Contents:**  
For information and action  
by schools and youth  
organisations

**Related Documents:**  
DE Circular 2004/1:  
"Encouraging A Smoke-  
Free Environment in  
Schools"  
DE Circular 2005/4:  
"Encouraging A Smoke-  
Free Environment in Youth  
Organisations"

**Superseded Documents:**  
None

**Expiry Date:**  
Not Applicable

**Enquiries:**

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# ENCOURAGING A SMOKE-FREE AND E-CIGARETTE FREE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this Circular is to encourage schools and youth organisations to extend the ban on smoking in school and youth premises to include a ban on the use of e-cigarettes.
- 1.2 The Department of Education's (the Department) Circulars of January 2004 (2004/1), "Encouraging A Smoke-Free Environment in Schools" and April 2005 (2005/4) "Encouraging A Smoke-Free Environment in Youth Organisations" highlighted the health risks associated with tobacco and with exposure to other people's smoke ("passive" or "second-hand" smoking). Both Circulars encouraged school authorities and youth organisations to put in place policies to ensure that the premises for which they are responsible are completely smoke-free environments. This Circular updates the earlier guidance reflecting key developments since that time, including legislative changes, the publication of the Ten Year Tobacco Control Strategy for the north of Ireland and recent advice from the Chief Medical Officer on the use of electronic-cigarettes (e-cigarettes) in the school environment. This advice is equally relevant to all youth organisations.

## 2. SMOKE-FREE LEGISLATION

- 2.1 Smoking remains the single greatest cause of preventable death and illness, killing over 2,300 people here each year. The harm caused by tobacco smoke also extends to non-smokers through exposure to second-hand smoke with children and young people being particularly vulnerable. The introduction of smoke-free legislation which seeks to protect employees and the public from exposure to second-hand smoke, however, has meant that, since 30 April 2007, it is against the law to smoke in most enclosed and substantially enclosed workplaces and public places including work vehicles and public transport. Premises, including those of schools and youth organisations, must be smoke-free **at all times**.
- 2.2 The Department recognises that schools and youth organisations here have worked to ensure that the school and youth service environments are completely smoke-free zones and that children and young people, staff and visitors are protected from the harmful effects of other people's smoke. However, some schools and youth organisations may operate policies which permit staff or visitors to smoke in designated outdoor areas. The Department would continue to encourage all schools and youth organisations to put in place a policy that results in the school and youth service environment, both indoor and outdoor, being completely smoke-free.

## 3. AGE OF SALE LEGISLATION FOR TOBACCO PRODUCTS

- 3.1 Legislation was introduced in September 2008 to raise the minimum age of sale for tobacco products from 16 to 18 years. The aim of the legislation is to reduce smoking prevalence among children and young people by making it more difficult for them to access tobacco products.

#### **4. TEN YEAR TOBACCO CONTROL STRATEGY FOR THE NORTH OF IRELAND – 2012-2022 (THE STRATEGY)**

- 4.1 In 2012 the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) published the “Tobacco Control Strategy”. While the Strategy recognises the progress that has been made to reduce the prevalence of smoking and the harmful effects of passive smoking, it also notes that most smokers become addicted to using tobacco as teenagers. Some 85% of smokers started smoking in their teens or younger – well before they are able to make an informed adult choice. Furthermore, in 2010, 8% of children aged 11 to 16 here were current smokers (by 2013, the prevalence rate had reduced to 5%). Consequently, children and young people are identified within the Strategy as one of three priority groups where focused action is required.
- 4.2 Preventing people – and in particular, children and young people – from starting to smoke is a key objective of the Strategy which includes an aspiration to reduce the percentage of smokers aged 11-16 years old to 3% by 2020.

#### **5. ROLE OF EDUCATION SYSTEM**

- 5.1 The education system plays a key role in seeking to ensure that children and young people are educated about and aware of the harmful effects of tobacco. The Department recognises that it is a matter for teachers, using their professional judgement, to determine what they teach and the resources to be used in delivering any given element of the curriculum. The statutory curriculum provides teachers with opportunities to teach young people about the dangers of smoking and it is very important that the environment in which they receive their education and are developed is as healthy as possible.
- 5.2 Within the curriculum the key opportunity to cover issues about the dangers of smoking is Personal Health which is a statutory component within Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at Primary level and within the Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work at Key Stages 3 and 4. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has produced a number of resources which address issues of smoking, either directly or indirectly to assist teachers in their delivery of the curriculum. These are available on the curriculum website: [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)
- 5.3 New drugs guidance is being prepared by CCEA/DE and will be available to schools before the end of the 2014/15 financial year. This new guidance will also include the issue of e-cigarettes.

## **6. NICOTINE CONTAINING PRODUCTS (NCPs)**

6.1 NCPs (of which e-cigarettes are the most common form) are battery-powered vapour inhaler devices which generally contain nicotine, along with propylene glycol and glycerine. They do not burn or use tobacco leaves but instead vaporise a solution which the user then inhales. They were developed for use as an alternative to tobacco products and have become increasingly popular in recent years. E-cigarettes may look like cigarettes or cigars, however, they may also be produced in the form of everyday items such as pens, USB memory sticks or larger cylindrical or rectangular devices.

6.2 While they are perceived to be less harmful than tobacco, NCPs are currently unregulated. As such, there are concerns about their safe use, particularly by children and young people. In order to address these concerns, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for the north of Ireland has written to the Department, to advise that the use of e-cigarettes on school premises should be prohibited, in line with tobacco products, for the following reasons:

- (i) nicotine is very addictive and, through e-cigarettes, has the potential to act as a gateway into tobacco smoking;
- (ii) there is evidence to suggest that adolescent exposure to nicotine may also have long-term consequences for brain development;
- (iii) the availability and promotion of e-cigarettes is reversing progress made by smokefree legislation to denormalise smoking; and
- (iv) there is insufficient evidence to determine whether the vapour produced by e-cigarettes causes damage to users' health in the long-term. The same applies to the impact of secondhand vapour exhaled by the user.

6.3 In addition, there is a potential risk that refillable cartridges used by some e-cigarettes could be filled with substances other than nicotine, thus possibly serving as a new and potentially dangerous way to deliver other drugs. As noted above, the revised Drugs Guidance for schools considers and addresses this issue.

## **7. E-CIGARETTES AS A SMOKING CESSATION AID**

7.1 There is some limited evidence to support the view that e-cigarettes may assist smokers to quit, however, it is insufficient to recommend their use in smoking cessation. The CMO has stated that the best advice for quitting smoking remains stopping completely with the support of cessation services and licensed nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). NRT products are also available to young people aged 12 and over.

## **8. DANGERS CONCERNING INHALATION/INGESTION BY CHILDREN**

8.1 Some e-cigarette refills are made with sweet-smelling chemicals and packaged in brightly-coloured tubes that could be attractive to young children. There are reports that a number of children have been poisoned by ingesting refill liquid within the last four years. However, as e-cigarettes are not currently regulated, they may not be childproof or carry appropriate health

warnings. The Public Health Agency (PHANI) has highlighted that the contents of e-cigarettes present a particularly serious risk to children if ingested, inhaled or if contact occurs with the skin or eyes. It is particularly important that e-cigarettes and refills are kept out of reach of children. In circumstances where a child or young person has swallowed e-cigarette liquid he/she should be taken immediately to an Emergency Department.

## **9. HEALTH AND SAFETY HAZARD**

- 9.1 There have also been reported incidents where e-cigarettes have exploded or the chargers have caused fires. It is important to note that employers have a duty of care and have to take account of any electrical equipment brought into the workplace by employees. To avoid the risks from untested equipment such as e-cigarettes, schools may place an outright ban on equipment outside their control. If an employer chooses to let employees use their own electrical equipment, the employer must accept full responsibility for its maintenance and safety. Any such equipment, if it is to be used in a school or youth service premises, requires regular visual inspection and possibly a portable appliance test (PAT) by a competent person in compliance with the Electricity at Work Regulations (NI) 1991. Schools should contact the appropriate Education and Library Board (pending the establishment of the Education Authority) for specific guidance on the Electricity at Work Regulations. Section 4.2 of the Education and Library Boards' "Smoke Free Workplace Policy" has also been updated to refer specifically to the use of e-cigarettes.

## **10. PROPOSED AGE OF SALE RESTRICTIONS FOR E-CIGARETTES**

- 10.1 At present, there are no age restrictions placed on the sale of e-cigarettes. In order to address this, the DHSSPS has included provisions in the draft Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, to allow for legislation prohibiting the sale of e-cigarettes to under-18s. It is expected that the new age of sale restrictions will be introduced in 2016.
- 10.2 In the interim the CMO has advised that schools should be encouraged to extend the ban on smoking on school premises to include a ban on the use of e-cigarettes. This advice is equally relevant to all youth organisations. It is important to note that the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) and the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) have revised and issued their existing Smoking Policy for Schools/Youth Settings to include e-cigarettes.

## **11. RECOMMENDATION**

- 11.1 Children and young people are more likely to become smokers themselves if parents or friends smoke, or if they are exposed to role models who smoke. In order to set an appropriate example for our young people, it is important that schools and the youth service are completely smoke-free and e-cigarette free environments.
- 11.2 Reflecting the advice of the CMO, the Department, therefore, encourages Principals, Boards of Governors, youth leaders and management of youth

organisations to take a lead role by ensuring that children and young people within their care are educated and developed within a completely smoke-free and e-cigarette free environment.

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