

17 April 2024

Dear Chair of the Northern Ireland Health Committee,

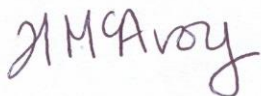
Thank you for the opportunity to present evidence to the Committee on 11 April on the Legislative Consent Memorandum relating to the Westminster Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

I have attached a summary of our evidence review on the health effects of e-cigarettes on children and young people for the Committee's consideration. This review found that vaping harms children's health, addicts them to nicotine, and has associations with future tobacco use.

I note that the Committee expressed an interest in receiving further evidence. My team are currently compiling an evidence pack to provide to the Committee. We are also committed to providing evidence updates during the progression of the Legislative Consent Motion in Northern Ireland, and the Westminster Bill. Please do keep us advised of any specific queries arising through further Committee presentations and discussions.

I am pleased to note that the Westminster Bill received majority support at its second reading yesterday. The second reading opening speech delivered by the Right Honorable Victoria Atkins MP emphasized that in the UK one hospital admission a minute is the human cost of smoking. She also noted that "thanks to constructive engagement from colleagues across the Devolved Administrations, these measures will apply not just to England, but across the entire United Kingdom – saving lives and building a brighter future."

Thank you again for the opportunity to engage with the Committee on this significant legislation and I look forward to supporting the Committee to realise a smoke-free generation in Northern Ireland.



Dr Helen McAvoy
Director of Policy



Briefing -

A review of systematic reviews on the health effects of vaping among children and adolescents

Full report available on request

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Background

This review was requested by the Department of Health to provide evidence to inform the development of policy and regulation on vaping in Northern Ireland. Vaping among children and young people is rising in Northern Ireland. In 2022, one-fifth (21%) of 11–16-year-old children reported that they ever tried a vape. The proportion of children vaping at least once a week doubled from 3% to 6% over the same period.

Methodology

The methodology was agreed in advance with the Department of Health. In order to meet policy cycle timelines, a rapid review of systematic reviews published in the last ten years was conducted using strict eligibility criteria. A quality assessment of each systematic review was conducted, and research overlap was also assessed.

Results

Twelve systematic reviews were found that investigated the health effects of vaping among children and adolescents. The outcomes found in our search included tobacco cigarette initiation (6), respiratory outcomes (3), mental health (1), drug use (1), and alcohol use (1).

Key findings:

- This report found strong, high-quality evidence of an association between vaping and future tobacco smoking. These results were based on systematic reviews containing longitudinal studies. These results support a gateway effect.
- There was also observational evidence of a relationship between vaping and
 - having asthma
 - increased rate of coughing
 - mental ill-health
 - other substance use.

Conclusion

There was strong, high-quality evidence that vaping among children was associated with harms to their health and future tobacco smoking.