E-cigarettes and their use in the workplace or public places

E-cigarette use is not covered by UK smokefree laws which prohibit smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces. Therefore it is left to organisations to decide their policy on an individual basis. As e-cigarette use is not covered by UK smokefree laws, their use should not automatically be included in the requirements of an organisation's smokefree policy. Smoking is defined clinically and in law, and it is important to note that the use of e-cigarettes does not meet the definition in either context.

Therefore, vaping is a different activity to smoking.

It is important that policies on the use of e-cigarettes in public and work environments are written with proper understanding of the available evidence and with the health of staff and the public in mind. Organisations which impose a blanket ban on e-cigarette use may not be supporting their employees, colleagues and customers to stop smoking.

Yorkshire Cancer Research strongly recommends that any organisation wishing to create an e-cigarette policy, or incorporate e-cigarettes into an existing policy, should familarise themselves with the advice produced by Public Health England (PHE)[1].

The five key principles of the PHE advice are:

1. Make clear the distinction between vaping and smoking
2. Ensure policies are informed by the evidence on health risks to bystanders
3. Identify and manage risks of uptake by children and young people
4. Support smokers to stop smoking and stay smokefree
5. Support compliance with smokefree law and policies

E-cigarettes have significant potential to help reduce the harm from tobacco caused to smokers, those around them and the wider society. Recognition of this should be at the centre of policies on e-cigarette use in public places and workplaces.

Some key points from each of the five principles are outlined below, however it is recommended that organisations wishing to develop or implement an e-cigarette policy in the workplace or a public place read the full guidance from PHE[1] and the related advice from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)[2].

1. Make clear the distinction between vaping and smoking

- Clearly distinguish between vaping and smoking when communicating messages and policies throughout your organisation.

- Smoking terminology should not be used to describe e-cigarette use.

2. Ensure policies are informed by the evidence on health risks to bystanders

- The risk to the health of bystanders from exposure to e-cigarette vapour is extremely low. This is in contrast to the conclusive evidence of harm from exposure to second-hand smoke, which contains harmful chemicals and provides the basis for UK smokefree laws.

- Although there is no evidence of harm to bystanders from exposure to e-cigarette vapour, organisations may wish to consider professional etiquette and other commerical considerations. For example, vaping can be seen as a nuisance or annoying for those situated close by - to minimise this vapers could be encouraged to minimise the amount of visible vapour produced.

- People who suffer from certain conditions such as asthma and other respiratory conditions may be sensitive to vapour - adjustments should be made as needed.

3. Identify and manage risks of uptake by children and young people

- Use of e-cigarettes is not recommended for young people. An e-cigarette policy for an environment which has young people present may have different requirements to policies in other settings.
- There is a need to guard against potential uptake by young people, of both vaping and smoking, but priority should be given to supporting young people not to smoke.

4. Support smokers to stop smoking and stay smokefree

- It is never acceptable to require vapers to share the same outdoor space as smokers. Where there is a designated outdoor smoking area, vapers should be allowed to vape elsewhere.
- Asking vapers to share the space with smokers could undermine a quit attempt or make it more difficult for people to stay smokefree.
- To maximise the number of smokers switching to e-cigarettes, vaping should be made a more convenient, as well as a safer, option.

5. Support compliance with smokefree law and policies

- It is generally easy to tell the difference between a cigarette and an e-cigarette, especially as new generation e-cigarettes look very different to tobacco cigarettes (attention should be paid to new tobacco heat not burn products which do still contain tobacco).

- Policies should be communicated effectively and it should be clearly indicated where vaping is or is not allowed.

NOTE: The information contained in this, and associated documents on e-cigarettes, does not apply to tobacco heat not burn products.

References

1. Public Health England, Use of e-cigarettes in public places and workplaces, 2016, https://gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-e-cigarettes-in-public-places-and-workplaces

2. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), Will you permit or prohibit e-cigarette use on your premises? 2015, http://ash.org.uk/information-and-resources/briefings/will-you-permit-or-prohibit-e-cigarette-use-on-your-premises/

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