

# Understanding and addressing the public health impact of e-cigarette use in children and young people in Wales

Public Health Network Cymru, 18 January 2024

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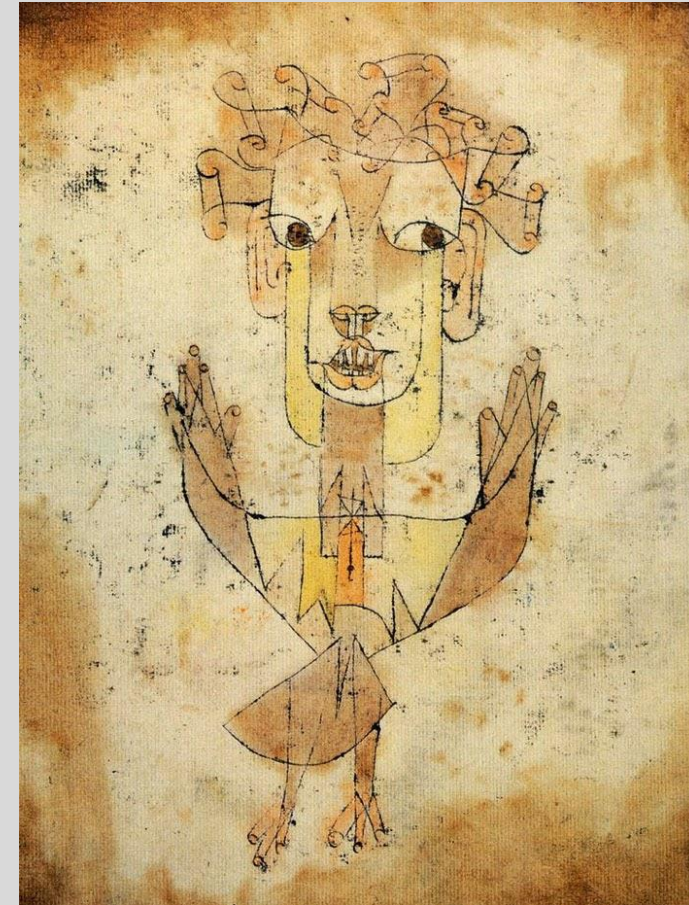
# Contexts, complexities and contested narratives

- Evidence: partial, emerging and sometimes disputed
- High levels of public and media interest (and concern)
- Many accounts of what is happening (usually in good faith – but.....)
- Commercial determinants of health: large, highly profitable potential market

**This is a story about vaping amongst children and young people**

**...and also a story about how we tell that story**

- Anchored in the evidence
  - Accepting of uncertainty
  - Promotes health at all levels
- (the story is still being written)*



# Where do you start?

- “It has been illegal to sell a vape to anyone under 18 in the UK since 2016”
- As a society, we have decided CYP shouldn't be vaping
- No-one is challenging the legal position
- This is (one) starting point we have found effective for PH narrative:
  - Clear, PH orientated framing of areas up for discussion
  - Consensus, uncontroversial statement (the law definitely says what it says)
  - Avoids beginning with 'are vapes GOOD or BAD' in ways that tangle narratives (e.g. child v adult vaping)
  - Limits opportunities to lead with 'shock stories'



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# Is vaping harmful?

- This is public health. So our first question should be....
- ...Harmful compared to what?
- **Vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking. Smokers who switch to vapes will be at much much less risk of health harms**
- This is a key public health message that must be delivered clearly and consistently
- BUT....
- Smoking is an incredibly harmful thing to do



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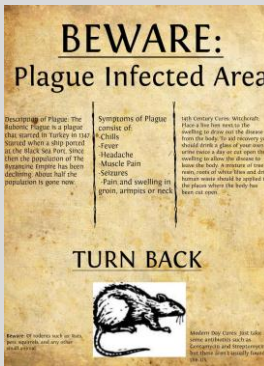
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# So.....is vaping harmful?

- Core issue of public health concern in Wales currently:

Increasing reports of children and young people experiencing nicotine dependency at a level where it is substantially affecting their health and wellbeing

- Additional issue: poisoning from non-complaint vapes
  - Issue of concern
  - Well connected system police / safeguarding / public health / CYP professionals
  - No known instances of severe harms (no PH response related to illegal vapes to date)

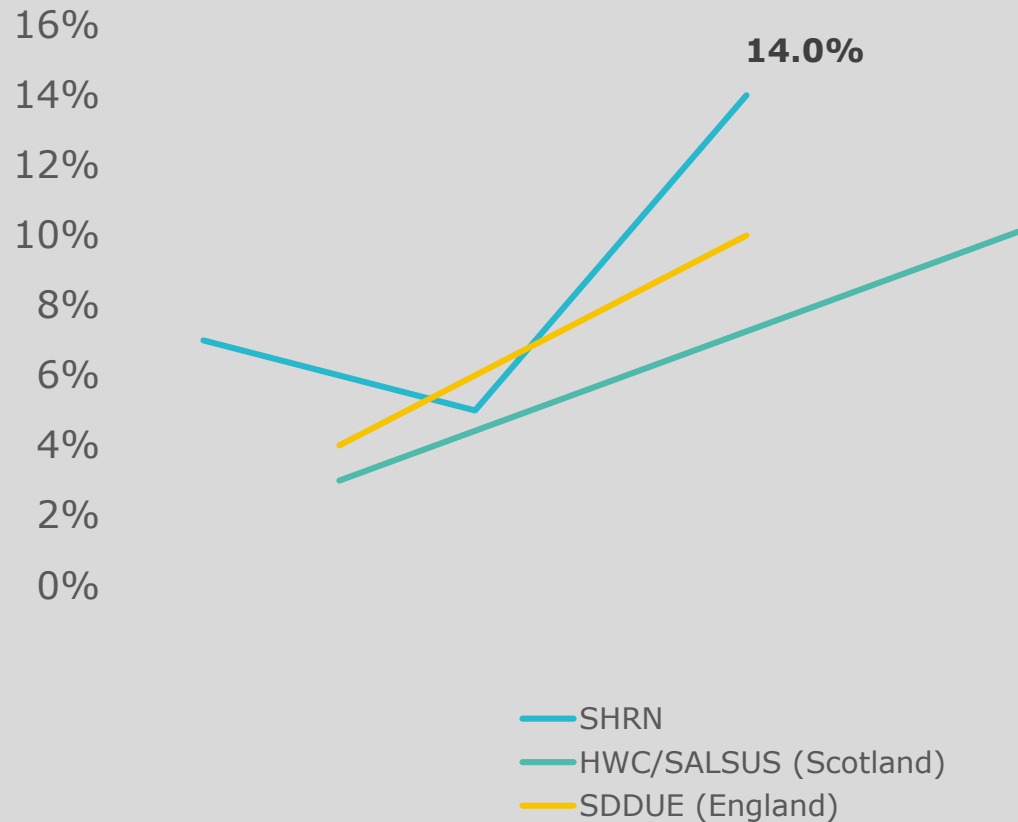
# How many children and young people are vaping?

- What proportion of 11-16yo in Wales reported vaping at least once per week in Wales in 2021?
- Well....
- ....how many do you think?
- **5% 11-16 year olds vaping once per week**
- **So most are not! Anchor conversations**
- Many CYP (and adults) think it is much more
- Comparisons:
  - Ever tried: 20% (rates and mechanisms of conversion?)
  - 3% smoke at least once per week
  - 7% drink alcohol at least once per week

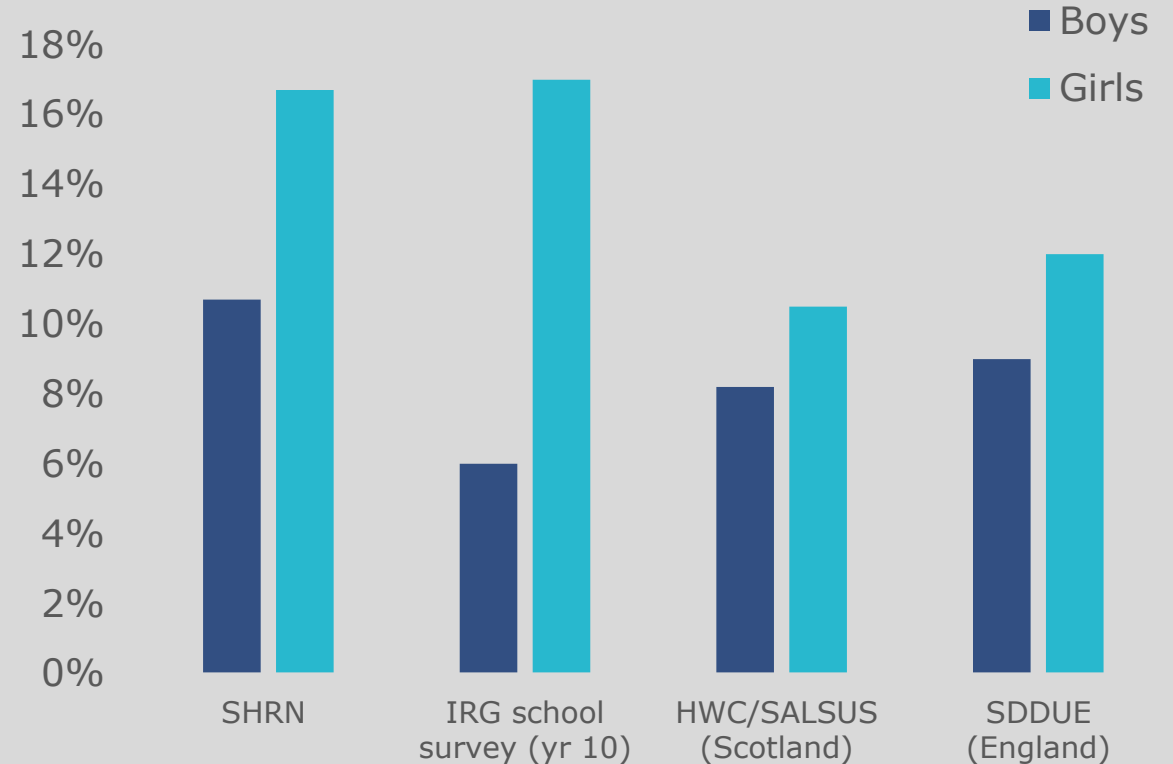


# Is use of vapes growing amongst CYP? Who is vaping?

## And is Wales different?



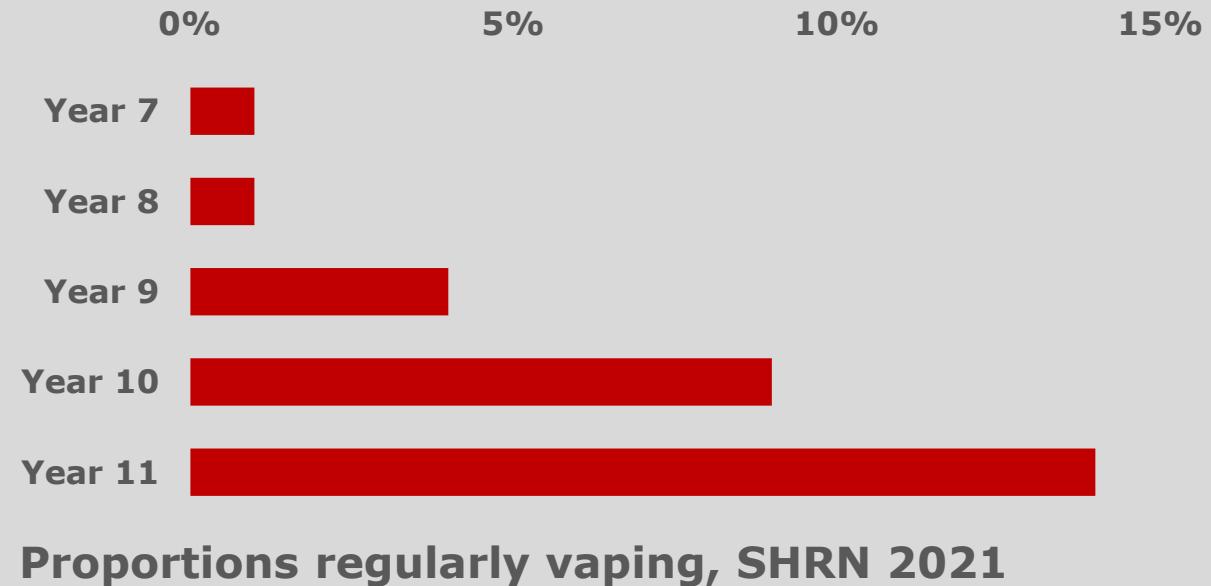
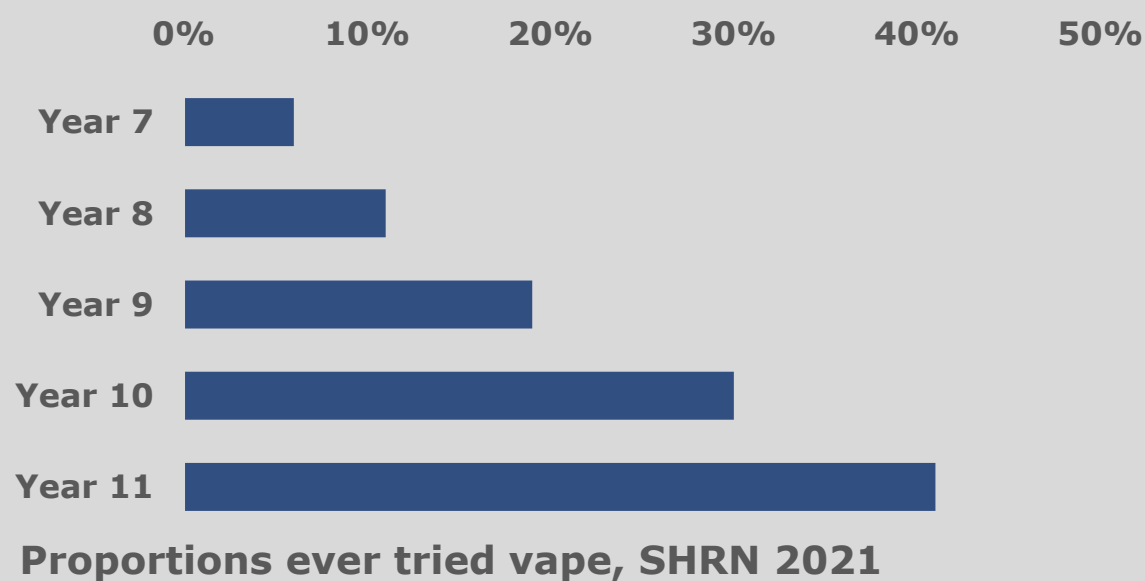
Regular (at least weekly) vaping, Year 11 pupils



Proportion of boys and girls in Year 11 using vapes at least weekly (most recent survey)

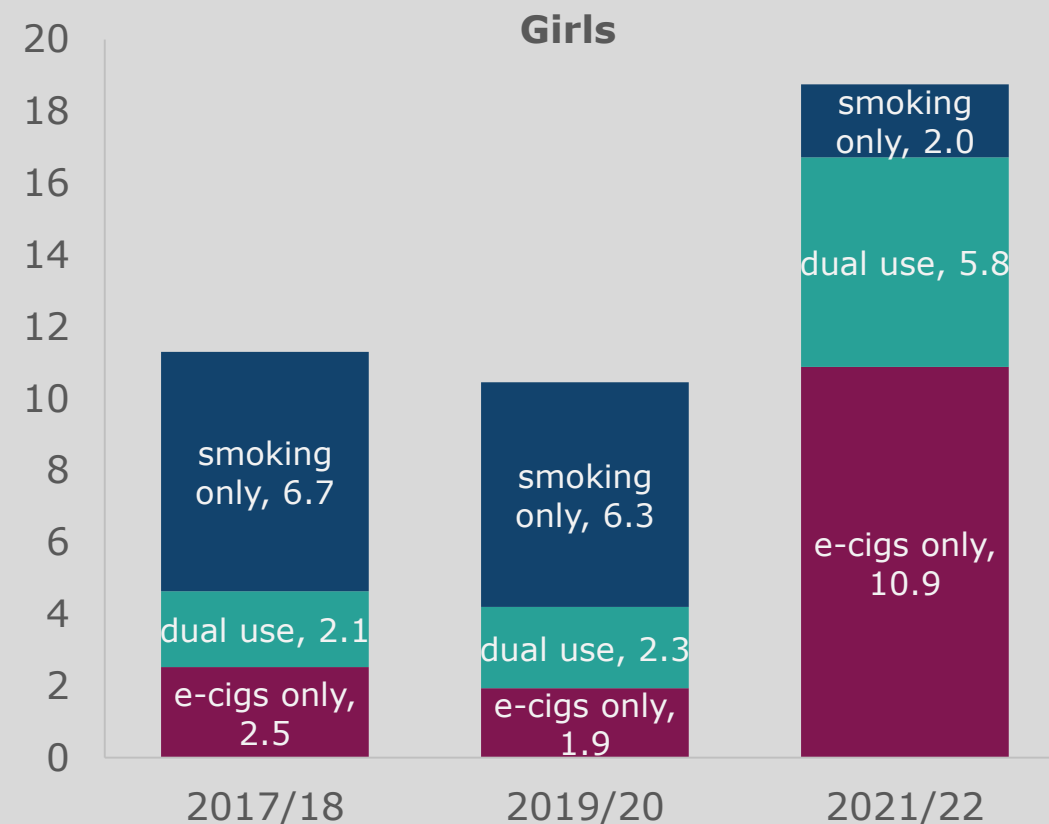
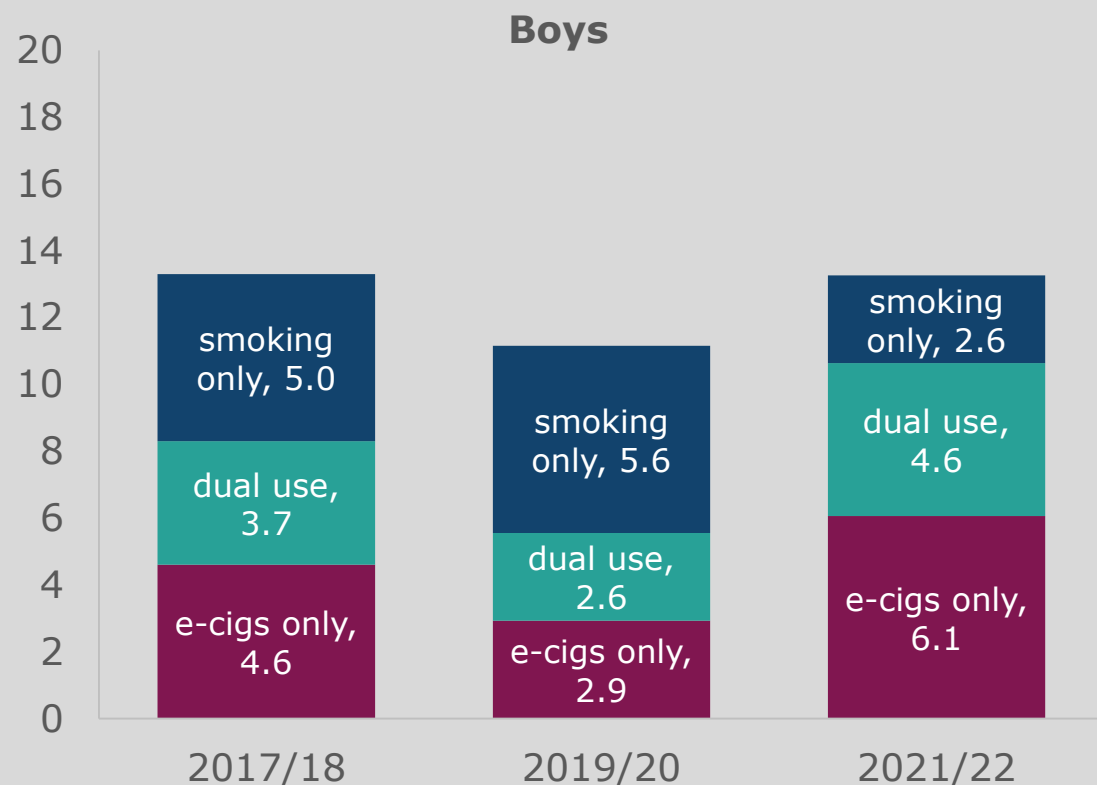
# What are young people's trajectories of vaping?

- **Trajectories of uptake are difficult to establish. The available evidence suggests that:**
  - Experimentation rises across year groups, but it is from year 10 onwards that higher proportions of experimenters become regular vapers
  - More evidence is needed in this area.





# How does vaping interact with smoking?



**Percentages in year 11** who i) smoke regularly ('smoking only'), ii) use e-cigarettes regularly (e-cigs only), iii) use both regularly ('dual use'), Wales, 2017/18, 2019/20 and 2021/22, Produced by Public Health Wales using, SHRN (DECIPHer)

*In 2021/22, approximately half the sample were asked the question about how often they use e-cigarettes. Therefore, only the data from that half of the sample could be used for this chart. As a result, estimates of smoking prevalence shown above for 2021/22 may differ slightly from published figures, and will be more subject to random variation than in earlier years due to the smaller sample size.*



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# What policies are being considered to address children and young people vaping?

- UK Government 'Smokefree Generation' legislation
  - Consultation closed Dec 2023
  - Bill expected shortly
- *(Illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone born after 1 Jan 2009)*
- Consideration on ban of disposable devices
- Limiting flavours, packaging, display in retail environments
- Increasing taxation



# Policy issues

- Policy continues to evolve – and the industry will continue to evolve with it
- Vapes are less harmful than tobacco; policy should reflect that
- Balanced view of CYP uptake and adult cessation
- Policy (and its communication) sends messages, so understand the messages you are sending (especially on risk)



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# Key messages

- Consider the story you are telling and how you are framing it
- Stay within the evidence, but acknowledge uncertainty
- Vaping does not exist in isolation and neither do children and young people
- Supporting schools and teachers – others will share more but:
  - PHW Guidance on vaping for secondary-aged learners in Wales (Cym/Eng)
    - <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/information-and-guidance-on-vaping-for-secondary-aged-learners-in-wales/>
  - Healthy Schools team developing the Guidance to support teachers to engage in lessons
  - Incident Response Group report published Jan/Feb 2024, inc guidance on principles of supporting learners identified as vapers



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