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European Dental  
Students' Association

# THE EFFECTS OF SMOKING & VAPING ON THE ORAL AND GENERAL HEALTH

European Dental Students' Association

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# 1. Introduction

The extensive use of tobacco products and vaping equipment poses a serious risk to public health with effects not only to the oral but the general health as well. Numerous health problems, including oral diseases like periodontal disease, mouth malignancies, and tooth decay, as well as severe systemic conditions like cancer, respiratory disorders, and cardiovascular disease, are associated with tobacco use (WHO, 2023). The high prevalence of tobacco and vaping, particularly among adolescents, despite intensive public health campaigns, calls for the adoption of more coordinated, multi-sectoral strategies and actions.

Tobacco's widespread harm extends beyond systemic health; it also has a significant impact on the oral cavity, which acts as a doorway for systemic infection and disease and a mirror to general health decline. The burden of tobacco-related oral health problems has significant societal and economic repercussions and affects function, psychological well-being, aesthetics, and quality of life. A decisive, multi-sectoral, and multidisciplinary approach is needed to combat this worldwide epidemic, with a particular emphasis on prevention, education, policy reform, and the active participation of aspiring medical professionals, especially dentistry students and practitioners (WHO, 2023).

Because e-cigarette vapour contains nicotine and other dangerous substances, vaping – which is sometimes thought of as a safer option than traditional smoking – still has a number of serious health concerns. According to new research, vaping may cause lung issues, gum disease, and poor tissue healing properties in general; the long-term health effects are still being studied (CDC, 2023). Both practices increase the risk of addiction and negatively affect dental health, which lowers quality of life and raises medical expenses.

This policy statement highlights how crucial it is to incorporate smoking prevention and cessation techniques into dental practice and teaching. In the battle against tobacco-related health inequities, it acknowledges the special role that dentists play as frontline advocates and engaged participants. It emphasises the crucial role that the dentistry community and other health stakeholders play in preventing these health risks by concentrating on prevention, education, regulation, cessation support, and research.

## 2. Definitions

- **Tobacco:** Any product made from the tobacco plant, mainly pipes, cigars, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco, that is used for chewing or smoking and is known to contain many dangerous compounds and addictive nicotine.
- **Vaping:** The process of inhaling and exhaling vapour or aerosol created by electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), also referred to as vape devices or e-cigarettes. Heating a liquid—typically including nicotine, flavourings, and other chemicals—is the process of vaping.
- **Nicotine:** An extremely addictive chemical that is present naturally in tobacco and some vaping liquids, nicotine causes dependence and raises a number of health hazards.
- **E-cigarettes:** Electronic devices that create aerosol for inhalation by heating liquids (also known as vape juices or e-liquids); promoted as a healthier substitute for smoking but linked to health hazards.

## 3. Purpose

The goal of this policy is to create a comprehensive, multi-layered framework for lowering the adverse health effects of vaping and tobacco use. It emphasises how crucial it is to coordinate efforts in order to encourage cessation, prevent beginning, and treat the adverse health effects of these behaviours. Promoting healthier lifestyles and lowering avoidable morbidity and death associated with tobacco use and vaping are the ultimate objectives.

## 4. The Scope of the Problem

Approximately 27% of Europeans continue to smoke regularly, a rate that is alarmingly high in many countries, particularly among adolescents, young adults, and vulnerable populations, despite the well-established evidence that smoking is the single most modifiable risk factor for over 70 diseases (Eurostat, 2022). Beyond personal health, the long-term effects put a strain on public health systems by raising healthcare expenditures significantly, reducing productivity, and increasing societal burden.

Because they frequently interact with patients' oral cavities, oral health professionals—especially dentists and dental students—have a strategic role in preventing tobacco use. This is due to the fact that they are commonly seen as an approachable and effective platform for health promotion and behavioural modification. Brief counselling and support from dental professionals has been shown to significantly increase smoking cessation rates (Johnson et al., 2017). However, there is a significant lack of thorough instruction on tobacco cessation, behavioural counselling, and public health advocacy in dentistry curricula throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

## **5. The Case for Action: Why Tobacco Control Must Be Central to Oral and Overall Health Strategies**

### **1. Impact on Oral Health**

Almost every structure in the oral cavity is negatively impacted by tobacco use. Prolonged exposure produces mucosal abnormalities such as leukoplakia or erythroplakia, accelerates the loss of alveolar bone, increases the incidence of oral malignancies, and hinders the healing of wounds. These consequences have a significant emotional impact since they not only jeopardise the longevity of natural dentition but also jeopardise prosthetic rehabilitation, hinder speech and mastication, and reduce aesthetic appearance (López et al., 2018).

### **2. Systemic Health Interconnections**

The oral cavity serves as a surveillance system for systemic illnesses; for instance, periodontal disease is associated with respiratory infections, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, and unfavourable pregnancy outcomes. A complicated web of harmful relationships is created when smoking intensifies these associations. Evidence that smoking increases systemic inflammation, endothelial dysfunction, and immunological suppression highlights the negative effects of smoking on systemic health (Sánchez et al., 2021).



### **3. Economic and Societal Burden**

Diseases linked to tobacco use have significant financial costs. According to estimates from the World Health Organisation, tobacco-related healthcare expenses in Europe total billions of euros every year, plus indirect costs associated with caring practices and lost productivity. Therefore, combating smoking is consistent with more general public health and economic sustainability objectives.

## **6. Policy Statement**

### **1. Encouraging Lifestyles Free of Tobacco and Vape**

- Start large-scale public health initiatives that highlight the dangers of vaping and tobacco use.
- To stop initiation, focus interventions should be created for young people and vulnerable populations.
- Encourage community-based initiatives that support healthy lifestyle choices.

### **2. Combining Support and Cessation Programs**

- Adopt evidence-based programs for quitting smoking and vaping in all medical settings.
- Assure accessibility to medication, digital support resources, and behavioural counselling.
- Provide motivational interviewing and cessation strategies training to medical professionals, including dentists.

### **3. Campaigns for Awareness and Educational Initiatives**

- Strengthen curricula in colleges and universities on the dangers related to tobacco use and vaping.
- Establish age-appropriate awareness campaigns to clear misunderstandings on smoking and vaping.

- Promote stringent laws governing the marketing, promotion, and sale of tobacco and e-cigarettes.
- Enforce minimum purchase requirements and age restrictions.
- Tobacco and vaping goods should be taxed in order to lower affordability and usage.
- Limit marketing strategies and flavourings targeted to young people.

#### **4. Research, Data Collection, and Monitoring**

- Encourage ongoing studies on the adverse health effects of vaping and tobacco use.
- Set up surveillance mechanisms to keep an eye on health outcomes and consumption patterns.
- Encourage longitudinal research to learn more about the long-term effects of vaping on systemic and dental health.

#### **5. Intersectoral Cooperation and Stakeholder Engagement**

- Encourage collaborations between the private sector, civil society, healthcare organisations, educational institutions, and government agencies.
- Integrate tobacco and vaping prevention into broader health and social development strategies.

## **7. Roles and Responsibilities**

EDSA reaffirms its commitment to tobacco and vaping prevention by promoting evidence-based education, public health advocacy, and interdisciplinary collaboration, empowering future dentists to serve as proactive agents in addressing tobacco-related health burdens.

**The European Dental Students Association (EDSA) will be a driving force behind the following initiatives:**

- Promoting the inclusion of smoke cessation in dental education.
- Assisting community outreach activities and student-led projects.

- Encouraging partnerships among European health organisations, policymakers, and academic institutions.
- Encouraging the study and sharing of tobacco control best practices.

#### **Institutions of higher learning must:**

- Include thorough tobacco-related content in their curricula.
- Offer hands-on instruction in behavioural intervention methods.
- Encourage students to get involved in public health advocacy.

#### **Students and future dentists should:**

- Make a commitment to advancing tobacco-free communities.
- Actively participate in patient counselling.
- Act as spokesman for legislative modifications that promote tobacco control.

## **8. Related Documents**

- WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control <https://www.who.int/fctc>
- U.S. Surgeon General's Reports on Tobacco and Vaping  
<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/tobacco/index.html>
- European Union Tobacco Product Directive (2014/40/EU)
- Research articles and guidelines on vaping health effects (CDC, 2023; WHO, 2023)

## **9. Conclusion**

Despite many efforts of the public health sector, tobacco smoking continues to be a primary public health concern. In addition to having clinical knowledge, dental professionals and students are essential in the fight against this disease since they are responsible for spearheading advocacy and behavioural change programs. We can drastically lower the burden of tobacco-related diseases throughout Europe by promoting efficient legislation, encouraging interdisciplinary cooperation, and incorporating comprehensive tobacco control techniques into dentistry education and practice.



With significant effects on oral and systemic health, chronic tobacco and vaping use poses a serious public health concern. To discourage commencement, encourage cessation, and lessen the long-term health effects of these behaviours, it is imperative to put in place efficient, multi-sectoral policies. In order to create a healthier future, dental practitioners must work in tandem with communities, educators, and legislators. Stakeholders can significantly lessen the burden of tobacco and vaping-related diseases and encourage healthier lives worldwide by raising awareness, enforcing laws, and funding research.

## 10. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

If you have any further inquiries regarding this policy, please contact the EDSA Policy Officer at [policy\\_officer@edsaweb.org](mailto:policy_officer@edsaweb.org).

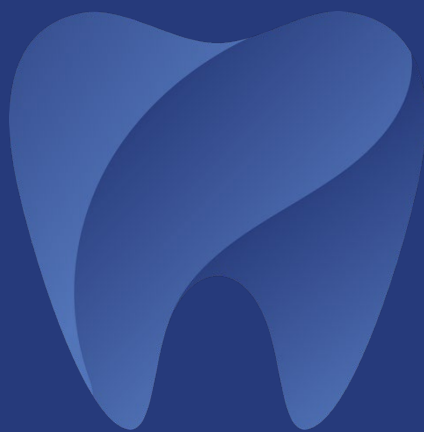
## 11. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the current Policy Officer of EDSA. It will be aligned with global health priorities and will incorporate feedback from professionals, stakeholders, and the community.

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European Dental Students' Association  
International Office - Dublin Dental University Hospital  
Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin  
Lincoln Place Dublin 2  
Ireland D02 F859