

# Conversation notes: No smoking in vehicles with children inside

These notes are intended to help support staff working with families, parents and carers, to have conversations about smoking in vehicles.

It has been illegal to smoke inside a vehicle with a child present since 2015. A recent survey found that 8% of Notts primary-aged children said that someone smokes in a vehicle when they are in it. We need to raise awareness of the law, and the reasons for it, to ensure that children are protected from secondhand smoke as the law intends.

Having conversations with parents, carers and families will help to reduce the exposure of children to secondhand smoke. It will also help to denormalise smoking in vehicles and encourage people to stop smoking completely.

## 1. What does the law actually say?

It is illegal to smoke inside a vehicle where there is a person under 18 present.<sup>i</sup> Both the driver and the smoker can be fined £50. The law applies to every driver in England and Wales, including those aged 17 and those with a provisional driving licence.

The law applies:

- to any private vehicle that is enclosed wholly or partly by a roof
- when people have the windows or sunroof open, or the air conditioning on
- when someone sits smoking in the open doorway of a vehicle

The law does not apply to:

- vapes (e-cigarettes)
- a driver who is 17 years old if they are on their own in the car
- a convertible car with the roof completely down

## 2. Why does the law exist?

The law aims to protect children from the impacts of secondhand smoke. When people smoke in an enclosed space, smoke lingers in the air. 80% of it is invisible. Breathing in this smoke can cause the same diseases as smoking – such as cancer, respiratory illnesses and heart disease.

Children breathe faster and their airways are smaller, so they breathe more of the harmful chemicals and it affects them more. Children exposed to secondhand smoke have increased risk of asthma, ear problems, and respiratory infections.<sup>ii</sup> Children who grow up in smoking environments are more likely to start smoking themselves.<sup>iii</sup>

No amount of secondhand smoke is safe. Opening car windows will not reduce harm. Air fresheners may hide the smell but can't get rid of harmful toxins.

Smoke particles settle and build up on indoor surfaces, becoming embedded in soft surfaces like car upholstery, and settling like dust on hard surfaces. These particles are gradually emitted over long periods – this is third hand smoke.

### 3. What does local intelligence tell us about smoking in vehicles?

In recent surveys<sup>iv</sup> of Notts school children:

- 23% of primary-aged children said they had a parent or carer who smoked.
- 29% of secondary-aged children said someone smoked in their home regularly.
- 8% of primary-aged children said someone smoked in a car when they were in it. When you consider that 23% of primary-aged children also said they had parents / carers who smoked, this suggests that a third of parental smokers could be smoking in vehicles with children present.

The sample sizes for these surveys are quite small at 1054 primary-aged and 1839 secondary-aged children in Notts; but nonetheless, these were concerning findings.

### 4. Advice for holding conversations about smoking in vehicles

Our suggested model for having a conversation follows the Very Brief Advice (VBA) for stop smoking framework of ASK, ADVISE, ACT. VBA is an evidence-based intervention recommended by NICE.

**ASK** - open the conversation by asking

- if anyone smokes in their family
- if they know that smoking is illegal inside vehicles where under 18s are present
- what they already know about the dangers of secondhand smoke, especially for children.

**ADVISE** people what the law says about smoking in vehicles and why the law was brought in – to protect children from secondhand smoke.

If their children could be at risk of exposure to secondhand smoke, explain how to protect their children:

1. The best way to protect children from secondhand smoke is for smokers to give up completely. Local, FREE support services are available and will increase the chances of giving up successfully.
2. But if they don't want to try that, they should reduce the risk to their children by making their car smokefree, ideally at all times to reduce third hand smoke exposure, but definitely by not smoking or allowing others to smoke in cars when children are present, in line with the law.

**ACT** by providing information about local stop smoking services if applicable.

Pregnant women will be offered stop smoking support through the maternity service. Other County residents can access a FREE stop smoking support service (see Section 5 below).

### 5. Further information about local community stop smoking service

The Your Health Notts stop smoking service is part of an integrated wellbeing service that can also provide support for other aspects of health.

The Your Health Notts stop smoking service is staffed by expert stop smoking advisors. It provides:

- 12 weeks of stop smoking support.
- An individually tailored plan for each person
- NRT, vapes or medication for 12 weeks - FREE of charge
- Behavioural support – offered either by telephone or face-to-face. An app option for digital support is currently being explored.

The service is open to any smoker aged 12 and over living in Nottinghamshire County. Sign up at **Quit Smoking - Your Health Nottinghamshire** ([www.yourhealthnotts.co.uk/quit-smoking](http://www.yourhealthnotts.co.uk/quit-smoking))



For residents of Nottingham City, they should be signposted to the equivalent local service at **Thriving Nottingham** ([www.thrivingnottingham.org.uk/programmes/stop-smoking](http://www.thrivingnottingham.org.uk/programmes/stop-smoking)).



Smokers who get support are three times more likely to quit successfully than those who try to quit alone.

## 6. What about vapes / vaping in cars?

There is no good evidence that secondhand vapour from e-cigarettes is harmful. However, as vaping is still relatively new, we can't be sure there aren't any long-term effects to people who breathe in someone else's vapour. So the NHS advises that people should avoid vaping near babies and children as a precaution<sup>vi</sup>. Although it's not illegal to vape in a car with under 18s, it would be best to refrain from vaping in vehicles too.

Vapes may be offered as a means of quitting smoking, as vaping is less harmful than smoking. But anyone who does not smoke, shouldn't start to vape, as although vaping is less harmful than smoking, that doesn't mean it is completely harmless.

## Further reading

Action for Smoking and Health (ASH) 2020 **Factsheet on secondhand smoke** ([www.ash.org.uk/resources/view/secondhand-smoke](http://www.ash.org.uk/resources/view/secondhand-smoke))



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- <sup>i</sup> UK Government (2015) **Rules about tobacco, e-cigarettes and smoking: 1 October 2015 - GOV.UK** ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))
  - <sup>ii</sup> Royal College of Physicians (2010) **Passive smoking and children – RCP London.**
  - <sup>iii</sup> Lavery AA, Filippidis FT, Taylor-Robinson D, et al. (2019) **Smoking uptake in UK children: analysis of the UK Millennium Cohort Study | Thorax (bmj.com)**
  - <sup>iv</sup> Schools Health Education Unit (2024) **The Nottinghamshire Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing Survey 2023/24**
  - <sup>v</sup> Papadakis, S. & McEwen, A. (2021) **Very brief advice on smoking PLUS (VBA+).** National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT), Dorset **Very brief advice on smoking (VBA)+ (ncsct.co.uk)**
  - <sup>vi</sup> NHS (2024) **Passive smoking - NHS (www.nhs.uk)**