

Vaping Substances controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act (VScMDA)

BACKGROUND

A small percentage of young people who vape are known to vape illicit substances. This new behaviour is of concern both locally and nationally. Most young people who vape illegal drugs may have been interested in, or vulnerable to experimenting with drugs.

Intelligence and conversations with young people have found that both THC (derived from cannabis) and spice (synthetic cannabinoid) are the most vaped illicit substances. The vaping of these substances can lead to acute medical concerns. In most cases, symptoms resolve within an hour.

OUR APPROACH

Our approach to this emerging challenge is based on the following:

- The development of a shared partnership approach that includes the Police; YP Treatment Service (YPTS); PCC Youth Service; UHP CYP Safeguarding Team and PCC Public Health working together to improve our system capability to respond.
- Increasing support to CYP affected: through new and existing roles both in YPTS and the Youth service.
- Increased support for education settings: supportive conversations being offered to schools to reduce potential (permanent) exclusions of young people. Resources and materials have also been provided to all schools to help them review their positions on vaping and exclusions.

Support provided:

- General guidance on responding to VScMDA
- Response options in respect to prevention of or alternatives to permanent exclusion
- Opportunities to improve knowledge of vaping
- Support from the Young Persons Treatment Service
- Support from the Police
- Support from Trading Standards
- Support from Public Health
- Monthly Meetings held by Public Health
- Circulation of resources and tools

Increased Support for CYP

SHARP and PCC's Youth Service have increased capacity to meet this new need. At present around 25% of YP in the YPTS service report vaping a substance as their primary drug, with the key referrers being schools.

Additional funding from the supplemental substance misuse treatment grant has been approved to fund two new FTE roles that will focus on vaping illegal drugs (1 x FTE Youth Worker and 1 x FTE YP Drug and Alcohol Worker).¹ Schools will be a key focus for these roles and funding will be on-going.

Increased Support for Educational Settings

A partnership offer has formed to support schools regarding the vaping of illicit substances.

Public Health hold monthly meetings for secondary schools with: Police, Youth Service, UHP Safeguarding, Trading Standards and YPTS. The meetings are well attended and are an opportunity to provide updates and engage in discussions to find solutions. The partnership helps schools respond to incidents and identify pupils who may be at most risk of being involved in future incidents and provide targeted prevention. This includes preventing drugs being taken onto school sites. Many of these young people have vulnerabilities or high levels of complexity.

Public Health are working with schools to provide alternatives to permanent exclusion where that is being considered i.e. by adding in options for engagement with the available support. Suggested approaches have been shared with schools. Each school / Multi Academy Trust will take their own approach to how they use this.

Some schools have requested and received a targeted intervention delivered by YPTS /Youth Service focussed on a group of young people identified as using vapes (for illegal drug use) or at risk of doing so. Ongoing requests for support are being accommodated.

A letter has been sent to all families of students with children at Plymouth Secondary Schools. This letter was developed by schools and Public Health and confirms that vapes of any kind should not be brought onto a school site.

Police Response

The Police are active in looking to disrupt supply routes and target adults that may be exploiting young people in respect to the supply of vape products containing illegal drugs.

The Police are a key partner in the city response to this emerging challenge and the Child Centred Police team work closely with schools to receive intelligence on suspected illegal vape reports.

¹ Procurement of the specialist YP treatment service has led to The Children's Society, a new provider, winning the contract. The new contract which will initiate on June 1st. These posts will be part of this.

Following an incident, the Police liaise with the Youth Service and YPTS to speak to a young person and/or their family, focusing on safeguarding.

Where there is evidence of a person supplying illegal substances to young people, Police action will be taken which may involve an arrest, depending on the circumstances.

The Police are also working as part of the wider partnership to support school assemblies focusing on the laws around these types of substances, and police powers and consequences if caught.

Other Activities to Note

Additional routes to more timely testing of some of the illegal vape liquids has been identified.

Shared practice: We have been seen as an area which has been proactive in addressing this and our resources have been shared across the SW and linked to national work.

John Clements (CYP Partnership Independent Scrutineer) has provided positive feedback on the educational webinars and approach in educational settings being taken.

UHP safeguarding nurses directly provide information on CYP presenting to the Emergency Department following vaping illegal substances enabling us to have insight to target response.