

Growing restrictions on vape sales making it harder for smokers to quit and driving others into hands of criminal dealers

Best way to stop teenagers using e-cigarettes is to properly police underage sales not ban flavoured ones that are helping so many adults to stay smoke-free



Health Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeill wants to ban flavoured vapes. Photo: PA via Getty

Ken Heffernan

The Government is due to publish legislation banning all flavoured vapes. I believe it shouldn't, and I fear the ban would have a negative impact on almost 200,000 adults who have stopped smoking with the help of such vapes.

First we need to look at the impact such a ban has had in Denmark, Australia and Canada. All have seen a dramatic rise in the use of illicit flavoured vapes.

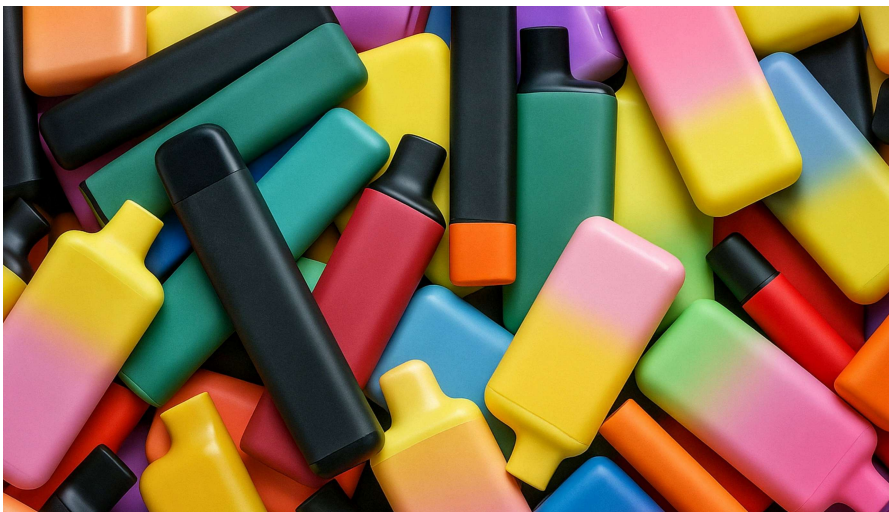
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Denmark banned flavoured vapes in 2022, yet the products remained widely accessible from unregulated sources.

In Australia, restrictions on adult access to flavoured vapes have led to the proliferation of illegal and unregulated products, often controlled by criminal gangs.



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Denmark, Australia and Canada all saw a dramatic rise in illicit flavoured vapes after their ban. Stock image/Getty

Independent research indicates that such a ban in Ireland would lead to ex-smokers either returning to smoking or buying flavoured vapes from abroad or online.

Health Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeill says she wants to ban flavoured vapes in order to stop children using them. That's like throwing the baby out with the bath water, because it will have a bigger impact on adults than on teens. The best way to prevent children buying vapes is to invest in policing the ban of vape sales to under 18s.

I am one of almost 200,000 smokers to quit with vapes. I quit 16 years ago, having smoked three packets of Rothmans a day for 30 years. I could not stop, despite both my parents dying from smoking-related lung cancer.

I tried everything – gums, sprays, hypnosis – and nothing worked. Then my brother suggested vaping. It worked.



Independent research indicates that a ban on flavoured vapes in Ireland would lead to ex-smokers either returning to smoking. Stock image

Flavoured vapes kept me, and others, off cigarettes.

The Government should listen to the voices of over 200,000 vapers who have given up cigarettes, rather than relying on personal views and comments from those who do not understand addiction.

The Taoiseach once described vaping as “the revenge of Big Tobacco” and “a mechanism to get nicotine back on the agenda”. These claims are not supported by the evidence. In fact, the majority of vape manufacturers are independent and not affiliated to the tobacco industry.

Smoking kills 6,000 people a year in Ireland. Vaping is helping over 320,000 smokers quit. I genuinely believe a flavour ban would be a gift to Big Tobacco and criminal gangs, not a victory for public health.



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Majority of vape manufacturers are independent and not affiliated to the tobacco industry. Stock image

Vapers are smoking quitters, not starters. International and domestic research consistently shows that most vapers are smokers seeking to quit. In Ireland, over 320,000 people currently vape – of whom, almost 200,000, have successfully quit smoking.

The Department of Health's Healthy Ireland survey shows that up to 20pc of ex-smokers successfully quit using flavoured vapes.

In 2024, the Government's own public consultation on vaping received input from over 15,000 citizens, the majority of whom highlighted the benefits of vaping as a tool for smoking cessation.

Vapers also expressed concern that banning flavoured vapes would push them back to smoking – a concern confirmed by a recent Red C poll, which found that, if flavours were banned, most vapers would consider returning to cigarettes.

The 2023 Healthy Ireland survey found that 25pc of successful quitters used vapes to stop smoking – compared to only 19pc who used nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs) such as gums or lozenges.

In the UK, hospitals are now providing vapes to inpatients with serious nicotine addiction to support their quit attempts.

Ireland's current EU-aligned regulations already ensure that vaping products are safe for adults and inaccessible to minors.

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Sweden rejected a flavour ban in 2022 yet is on the brink of "smoke-free" status and attributes much of its success to the availability of safer nicotine alternatives, including vaping.

The failure to consider a growing body of international scientific evidence, including recent studies on flavoured vapes and smoking cessation, undermines the policymaking process and I believe will leave some vapers with no alternative but to go back to smoking.

Ken Heffernan is a supporter of Respect Vapers, a group that represents Irish people who vape

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