

# Factsheet: Smoking and vaping - the Irish situation 2026

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## What does smoking do?

- takes 10 to 15 quality years off your life
- causes cancer, heart attacks, stroke, lung disease, blindness, diabetes and many other diseases
- reduces fertility for both women and men and makes it harder to start a family
- can lead to ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage and stillbirth if you smoke during pregnancy
- has a negative effect on mental health
- is an expensive habit - smoking 20 cigarettes a day adds up to over €5,000 a year <sup>1</sup>

## How do we know how many people smoke in Ireland?

The Healthy Ireland Survey is an annual survey designed to increase knowledge of the population's health and health behaviours.<sup>2</sup> It is commissioned by the Department of Health, carried out by Ipsos B&A, and conducted with a representative sample of the general population aged 15 years and over. For the 2025 Survey, telephone interviews took place between October 2024 and April 2025 with 7,556 respondents. Questions about smoking are routinely asked in each wave of the survey.

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children HBSC study<sup>3</sup> is a cross-sectional research study conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe. The HBSC international survey runs on an academic four year cycle and in 2021/2022 there were 51 participating countries and regions.

The seventh European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs ESPAD<sup>4</sup> survey was undertaken in 39 European countries during 2019 and collected information on alcohol, tobacco and other substance use among 15-16-year-old students. In Ireland, 1,949 questionnaires were completed by young people who were born in 2003 from 50 randomly selected post-primary schools.

## How many people smoke in Ireland?

The Healthy Ireland Survey 2025 found:<sup>2</sup>

17% of the population are current smokers, with 13% daily smokers and 4% occasional smokers. Smoking rates have remained static since 2019.

- Smoking is higher amongst men (20%) than women (14%) and amongst those with a Leaving Certificate or lower (21%) than those with higher levels of education (11%).
- 30% of the population are ex-smokers. 46% of those who have smoked in the past year have attempted to quit smoking.
- During their last attempt to quit, 67% of smokers did so without using any quitting aids.

- Of the 33% of people who used at least one quit aid during their last attempt to quit, 18% used nicotine patches, gum, lozenges or spray, 11% used an e-cigarette and 2% used a nicotine pouch/pod. Only 1% used [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) to help them quit during their last attempt.
- 8% of the population currently use e-cigarettes either daily (5%) or occasionally (3%), with a further 12% reporting they have tried them in the past but no longer use them. In 2022, 6% were current users of e-cigarettes.
- A fifth (20%) of women aged 15-24 use e-cigarettes either daily or occasionally; the rate for men of the same age group is 16%.

**Table 1: Last year prevalence of smoking (%)**

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
23	23	22	20	17	18	18	18	17	17

Source: Health Ireland surveys

## How many young people smoke in Ireland?

The 2022 HBSC study included 9,071 school-children from 9 to 18 years old; 191 primary and post-primary schools across Ireland participated.<sup>3</sup>

- 4% of boys and 5% of girls report that they are current tobacco smokers.
- Overall, 8% of boys and 10% of girls report that they have ever smoked cigarettes.
- Older children are more likely to report that they have ever smoked cigarettes/current smokers than younger children.

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD)<sup>4</sup> has conducted surveys of school-going children every four years since 1995, using a standardised method and a common questionnaire (see [www.espad.org](http://www.espad.org)). The eighth survey<sup>4</sup> was undertaken in 37 European countries during 2024 and collected information on alcohol, tobacco and other substance use among 15-16-year-old students. In Ireland the final sample included 1,880 students born in 2008. The study found that:

- 23.7% of students in Ireland used cigarettes in their lifetime (21.7% of male students and 24.7% of female students)
- 9% were current smokers (8.0% of male students and 9.4% of female students)
- About 2% of students reported being daily smokers
- 25% of students in Ireland used e-cigarettes in last year (22.4% of male students and 27.4% of female students).

For further information go to the [ESPAD data portal](http://www.espad.org) where you can search for “cigarette or e-cigarette” and filter by Ireland.

## At what age do people start smoking?

The average age that smokers report having tried their first cigarette was 16 years, while the average age for initiating daily smoking was 18 years. These figures are unchanged since 2023.<sup>5</sup>

- Men typically report having started smoking at a younger age than women. The average age for men to have tried their first cigarette was 15 years, with daily smoking typically starting at 18 years. For women, it was 16 years and 19 years respectively. The age at which women start smoking daily increased from 18 years to 19 years since 2023.
- The average age that people report trying their first cigarette was 15 years for those who have not completed their Leaving Certificate, while it was 17 years on average for those with degree level education or higher.

According to ESPAD 2024<sup>4</sup> age 14 years was the age most commonly reported for smoking initiation (7.2%). Almost 2% of students reported that they started smoking at age 11 or younger. A further 3.3% of students reported starting to smoke at age 12 years, being 4.4% of female students and 2.2% of male students.

## How many people have attempted to or quit smoking in Ireland?

Almost a third (30%) of the population are ex-smokers. As has been the case across all recent Healthy Ireland Survey waves, there are more ex-smokers than current smokers in all age groups above the age of 25.<sup>5</sup>

- 51% of those who have smoked in the past year have attempted to quit smoking, with 22% of this group successfully quitting smoking (11% of all who smoked in the past year). 70% of those aged 15 and 24 who smoked in the past 12 months have tried to quit, with 32% this group doing so successfully.
- Two-thirds (66%) of smokers making an attempt to quit, did so without using any quitting aids. 7% of all who smoked in the past year, successfully quit smoking without using a quitting aid.
- A fifth (20%) of those who tried to quit smoking in the past 12 months report using nicotine patches, gum, lozenges or spray, and 12% report using e-cigarettes.
- Just over a third (35%) of current smokers are either trying to quit or actively planning on doing so.
- 32% of daily smokers are either trying to quit or actively planning on doing so, compared with 45% of occasional smokers.
- 23% of those not currently planning to quit or not thinking about doing so have made an attempt to quit in the past 12 months.

## E-cigarettes and nicotine pouches

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery-powered devices. They heat nicotine mixed with flavourings and other chemicals to create an aerosol to inhale. Using an e-cigarette is known as vaping.<sup>6</sup>

The Healthy Ireland Survey 2025 shows that:<sup>2</sup>

- 8% of the population currently use e-cigarettes either daily (5%) or occasionally (3%), with a further 15% reporting they have tried them in the past but no longer use them.
- E-cigarette usage is highest among younger people, with 18% of 15-24 year olds reporting that they use to use daily (11%) or occasionally (7%). Among this age group, usage is higher among women (19%) than men (16%), with usage dropping by 4-points in men (down from 20% in 2024) and increasing by 4 points for women (19%, up from 15% in 2024).
- 50% of all e-cigarette users are ex-smokers, while 33% of e-cigarette users are current smokers (Daily: 18%, Occasionally: 15%). The remaining 17% have never smoked.
- Of those that use e-cigarettes daily or occasionally, 36% use disposable devices, 49% use devices that can be refilled, and the remaining 26% use devices that can be recharged with a disposable single-use cartridge.
- 38% of e-cigarette users buy e-cigarettes, e-liquids or cartridges in specialist e-cigarette retailers and 27% buy them from newsagents, off-licences, or corner shops. Other less common but notable locations people buy e-cigarettes include petrol stations (12%), supermarkets (10%), and specialist e-cigarette retailers (7%).
- 38% perceive e-cigarettes as more harmful than cigarettes, 36% thought they are equally harmful, and 11% felt they are less harmful. The remaining 15% said they did not know.

1% of the population currently use nicotine pouches either daily (1%) or occasionally (<1%), with 6% saying they have tried them in the past but no longer use them.<sup>2</sup>

### How many people receive cessation support?

HSE data management key performance indicators reports are prepared monthly by the Health Service Executive and provide detailed performance data for the full suite of key performance indicators, and activity targets contained in the [National Service Plan](#). We have included some of the available data here, for more information see the latest published report.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 14: HSE tobacco key performance indicator data, target/expected activity and activity, year to date (YTD), National and RHA areas, December 2025 report.**

Key performance indicator	Target/EA YTD	Activity YTD
HWB27B: No. of smokers who received face to face or telephone intensive cessation support from a HSE trained and accredited stop smoking advisor (Community)	15,109	12,142
HWB27C: No. of smokers who received face to face or telephone intensive cessation support from a HSE trained and accredited stop smoking advisor (Hospitals)	3,185	3,978
HWB27: No. of smokers who received face to face or telephone intensive cessation support from a HSE trained and accredited stop smoking advisor	20,775	21,125
HWB27D: No. of smokers who received face to face or telephone intensive cessation support from a HSE trained and accredited stop smoking advisor (Quitline)	2,481	5,005
HWB101: No. of smokers who are receiving online cessation support services	7,000	9,276
HWB26: % of smokers on cessation programmes who were quit at four weeks	50	57.7
HWB110: % of smokers engaging with HSE Stop Smoking Services and using recommended Stop Smoking	70	77.9

Source: Health Service Executive (2026) [HSE data management report, December 2025](#). Dublin: Health Service Executive.

Please note that the HSE issues regular data management reports, see the latest for the most up-to-date data.

## How many people die from smoking?

1 in 2 smokers will die from a tobacco-related disease. Every week, over 100 people die and over 1,000 people are hospitalised in Ireland from smoking-related illness.<sup>1</sup>

## What does the law say about smoking?

The General Scheme of the Public Health (Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill<sup>8</sup> was published in September 2024. It is anticipated that two bills will arise from this General Scheme. The first is the Public Health (Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill to further regulate nicotine inhaling products, commonly known e-cigarettes or vapes in relation to packaging and appearance, signage, display and advertising. The second is the Public Health (Single Use Vapes) Bill which will seek to ban the sale of single-use or disposable vapes.<sup>9</sup>

The list below highlights some key legislation relating to smoking in Ireland.

### **Timeline of key smoking legislation in Ireland:**

2025: Ban on the sale by self-service of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products such as e-cigarettes

2023: Ban the sale of nicotine inhaling products such as e-cigarettes (commonly referred to as vapes) to persons under 18

2023: Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act 2023

2017: Standardised (Plain) Packaging of Tobacco

2014: Ban on smoking in cars with children present

2014: EU Tobacco Products Directive

2011: Graphic warnings on packaging

2009: Restrictions on sale (number and mode of sale) removal of point-of-sale tobacco displays

2007: A ban on packets containing less than 20 cigarettes

2007: A ban on the sale of confectionaries that resemble cigarettes

2005: WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ratified

2004: Workplace Smoking Ban

2002: Office of Tobacco Control established Prohibition on advertising & sponsorship

1991: Certain regulations on tobacco advertising

1988: Smoking banned in public buildings

Under the [Public Health \(Tobacco\) Acts 2004](#) it has been illegal to smoke in all enclosed workplaces, Ireland was the first country in the world to do this.

## References

1. Health Service Executive (2026) [Smoking facts and figures](#) [Accessed 07 April 2026].
2. Ipsos B&A. (2025) [Healthy Ireland survey 2025 - summary report](#). Dublin: Healthy Ireland, Department of Health
3. Gavin A, Kolto A, Lunney L, Maloney R, Walker L, Nic Gabhainn S and Kelly C (2024) [The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children \(HBSC\) Study 2022](#). Galway: Department of Health and University of Galway
4. Hanafin J, Sunday S, Fitzmarice H and Clancy L (2025) [ESPAD Ireland 2024: results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs](#). Dublin: TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland for the Department of Health Ireland.
5. Ipsos B&A. (2024) [Healthy Ireland survey 2024 - summary report](#). Dublin: Healthy Ireland, Department of Health
6. Health Service Executive (2026) [Vaping \(using e-cigarettes\)](#) [Accessed 07 April 2026].
7. Health Service Executive (2026) [HSE data management and performance profile reports 2025](#). Dublin: Health Service Executive.
8. Oireachtas Library & Research Service. (2026) [Policy and legislative briefing paper. General Scheme of the Public Health \(Nicotine Inhaling Products\) Bill](#). Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas.
9. Oireachtas Library & Research Service (2026) [Public Health \(single-use vapes\) Bill 2025](#). Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas.

### Further resources:

- World Health Organization(2023) [WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2023: protect people from tobacco smoke](#). Geneva:World Health Organization
- McCarthy A, Lee C, O'Brien D and Long J (2020) [Harms and benefits of e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn tobacco products: a literature map](#). Dublin: Health Research Board.
- Quigley J, Kennelly H, Lee C, O'Brien D, Williams M, McCarthy A and Long J (2020) [Electronic cigarettes and smoking cessation: an evidence review](#). Dublin: Health Research Board.
- O'Brien D, Long J, Lee C, McCarthy A and Quigley J (2020) [Electronic cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking initiation in adolescents: an evidence review](#). Dublin: Health Research Board
- Evans DS, O'Farrell Anne and Hickey Paul (2017) [Roll your own cigarettes in Ireland: key patterns and trends](#). Dublin: Health Service Executive
- Irish Cancer Society (2021). Irish Cancer Society position on e-cigarettes. [online] Available at: <https://www.cancer.ie/about-us/about-the-irish-cancer-society/what-we-do/cancer-advocacy/positions-and-policy-statements/e-cigarettes-and-vaping>

### Useful websites:

- HRB National Drugs Library <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/>
- Health Service Executive [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie)

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