Use of electronic cigarettes before, during and after pregnancy

Key messages for health professionals working with pregnant women and their babies
E-cigarettes (vapes) are much less harmful to health than tobacco.

Smoking during pregnancy can harm the baby in the womb from day one. Stopping smoking is one of the best things a woman and her partner can do to protect the health of their baby through pregnancy and beyond.

While licensed nicotine replacement (NRT) products are the recommended option, if a pregnant woman chooses to use an e-cigarette to help her quit smoking and stay smokefree, she should be supported to do so.

Using an e-cigarette without stopping smoking does not provide health benefits; anyone who is using both should be strongly encouraged to stop smoking as soon as they can.

There is no reason to believe that using an e-cigarette would compromise breastfeeding. Women who vape following birth should not be discouraged from doing so if it enables them to stay quit and maintain a smokefree home.

For data recording purposes, a woman who has stopped smoking completely and switched to vaping is classified as a non-smoker.

Using an e-cigarette can be much cheaper than smoking in the long term.

This document is a summarised at-a-glance version of the ‘Guide for maternity and other healthcare professionals’ which can be found on the Challenge Group website, along with an infographic for pregnant women.
E-cigarettes, also called vapes, are designed for users to inhale nicotine through a vapour rather than smoke. They work by heating a solution that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol and vegetable glycerine, and flavourings. They do not contain tobacco.

E-cigarettes carry only a small fraction of the risk of smoking. They do not contain carbon monoxide (CO) or many of the other harmful chemicals found in cigarettes, though they are not risk free.

The great majority of the harm from smoking comes from inhaling tobacco smoke. While it is nicotine that makes tobacco so addictive, it is relatively harmless on its own.

CO from tobacco cigarettes is especially dangerous during pregnancy. It deprives the baby of oxygen, slows its growth and development, and increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth and sudden infant death.
Q. I’ve been using an e-cigarette to help me stop smoking – now I’m pregnant, should I stop using it?

A. If you feel able to stop vaping or to switch to NRT without going back to smoking then you could try to do so. However, if you think stopping vaping is likely to cause you to relapse into smoking, you should continue to vape.

Q. Is secondhand vapour from e-cigarettes harmful to pregnant women?

A. There is currently no evidence of harm to bystanders from exposure to e-cigarette vapour and any risks are likely to be extremely low. Exposure to secondhand smoke from cigarettes during pregnancy increases the risk of stillbirth, miscarriage and sudden infant death (SIDS).

Q. Can I use an e-cigarette if I’m breastfeeding?

A. If vaping is helping you to quit smoking and stay smokefree, you should carry on with it, including while breastfeeding. Based on the available evidence on e-cigarette safety there is no reason to believe that using an e-cigarette would compromise breastfeeding.