

Electronic Cigarettes (E-cigs)/Vapourisers in Pregnancy

Q—What are electronic cigarettes?

A—E-cigs/vapourisers deliver nicotine through a vapour rather than smoke. They heat and vapourise a solution that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol or vegetable glycerine, and flavourings. E-cigs do not burn tobacco and do not produce tar or carbon monoxide. They are 'vaped' rather than smoked and although the vapour has been found to contain some toxicants also found in cigarette smoke, these are at much lower levels.

Q—Are e-cigs safe to use?

A - E-cigs are not completely risk free. However based on the current evidence they carry a fraction of the risk of smoking. If using an e-cig helps you stay smokefree, it is much safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke. Whilst the vapour produced by e-cigs contains some toxicants, these are either at much lower levels than those found in tobacco smoke or at levels not associated with serious health risk. Most importantly, e-cigs do not contain carbon monoxide, which is particularly harmful to developing babies. E-cigs are still fairly new and we don't yet have evidence on whether there are any effects of longer term use. We also don't know about any risks to unborn babies from exposure to vapour. Mothers-to-be are advised to access support to stop smoking from a stop smoking service as this has been shown to be effective in helping smokers quit. You can also use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products, which are licensed as medicines for use in pregnancy and are free when prescribed.

Q. Is there carbon monoxide in e-cigs?

A. No. E-cigs do not contain carbon monoxide (CO) or many of the other harmful chemicals found in cigarettes. If you are using e-cigs only and are not exposed to other sources of CO, such as from secondhand smoke, you should still have the same low reading as a non-smoker from a CO test.

Q. What about the risks from nicotine?

A. Most of the harm from smoking is from inhaling tobacco smoke which contains around 4,000 chemicals, many of which are toxic. Nicotine makes tobacco so addictive, but it is relatively harmless. Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as patches, lozenge, etc. helps people stop smoking and is safe, including in pregnancy.

Q. Can I use an e-cig to help me quit smoking?

Currently there are no e-cigs available that are licensed as medicines. We don't yet know about any potential risks to the foetus from exposure to e-cig vapour. Many smokers find e-cigs helpful for quitting smoking, and evidence shows that they can be effective. If you do choose to use an e-cig and if that helps you to quit and stay smokefree, it is far safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke. Use the e-cig as often as you feel the need. Whatever method you choose to quit smoking, you will give yourself the best chance if you get free help and support from your local stop smoking service.



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Q. Is it OK for partners or other household members to vape around pregnant women?

A. If you allow partners and others to vape near you is your decision. There is currently no evidence of harm to bystanders from exposure to e-cig vapour and any risks are likely to be extremely low. Household members who choose to use e-cigs pose a lot less risk to those around them than if they continued to smoke. However, you could consider asking household members who vape not to do so in the same room as you or to go outside. In addition, e-cigs generally produce an odour. Women in pregnancy are often more sensitive to strong smells and may find the smell of some e-cig vapours unpleasant.

Q. Can e-cigs be used around the baby after it is born?

A. There is currently no evidence of harm to bystanders from exposure to e-cig vapour and any risks are likely to be extremely low. If you have any concerns, you could consider not allowing vaping in confined spaces at home or in your car and using NRT instead. The most important thing is to stay smokefree and protect your baby from the harm of secondhand smoke. If allowing the use of e-cigs indoors helps you to maintain a smokefree home, it is a far safer option than allowing smoking. Nicotine in e-cigs poses little danger to adult users. However, to prevent accidental poisoning of children, e-cigs and liquids should be stored away safely (just as you would with household cleaning products and medicines, including NRT products). Additionally, e-cigs should only be charged with the correct charging equipment. They should not be left charging near babies and toddlers and should at all times be placed well out of the reach of young children.

Q. Are there any recommended brands of e-cigs for use in pregnancy?

A. There are currently no e-cigs with a medicinal licence on the market, meaning they cannot be prescribed and no particular brand or product can be recommended. Specialist retailers and internet forums can provide more information about different types of e-cigs and how best to use them. Some evidence suggests refillable 'tank' devices are better at delivering nicotine to help people stop smoking compared with disposable or rechargeable 'cigalikes'.

Q. Can I keep smoking a little bit if I'm also using an e-cig?

A. No. Every cigarette causes damage both to you and your baby. The only way to prevent this damage is to stop smoking completely. Stopping smoking early in pregnancy can almost completely prevent damage to the baby and stopping at any time during pregnancy reduces the risk of damage. If using an e-cig helps you to stop smoking and to stay smokefree, this will be far safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke. Whatever method you choose to quit smoking, you will give yourself the best chance if you get free help and support from your local stop smoking service.

Q. I've been using an e-cig to help me stop smoking now I'm pregnant, should I stop using it?

If you feel able to stop using ecigs or to switch to NRT without going back to smoking then you should try to do so. However, if you think stopping using e-cigs is likely to cause you to relapse into smoking, you should continue to use your e-cig. While not completely risk free, existing evidence suggests that using an e-cig while you are pregnant is much safer than smoking.

Adapted from: Use of electronic cigarettes in pregnancy—a guide for midwives and other healthcare professionals, Produced by Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group, 2016