

Smoking and Vaping in Britain: How Scotland Compares

In recent years, the United Kingdom has observed notable shifts in smoking and vaping behaviors, with Scotland presenting unique trends within this broader context. A recent study on [Scottish smoking habits](#) offers insights into these patterns, highlighting regional nuances and public health implications. While national smoking rates have steadily declined, Scotland's figures reveal persistent challenges, particularly among lower-income populations and young adults. This article explores the latest statistics, policy developments, and the implications for public health in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK.



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National Overview

As of 2024, over 5.6 million adults in Britain engage in vaping, representing approximately 11% of the adult population. This marks the highest recorded level of vaping in the country. Notably, more than half of these vapers are former smokers, indicating a significant shift from traditional smoking to vaping. However, concerns have been raised about the dual use of cigarettes and vapes, which has doubled from 17% in 2021 to 32% in 2024, affecting 2.2 million individuals. This trend suggests that while vaping serves as a cessation tool for some, others continue to use both products concurrently, potentially mitigating the benefits of quitting smoking altogether.

Another challenge in tobacco control efforts is the increasing accessibility of nicotine products. While cigarette sales have been regulated for decades, the booming vaping industry has led to a proliferation of unlicensed retailers and online sales platforms. Many experts argue that better enforcement of age restrictions and stronger oversight of vape manufacturers are needed to prevent underage access.

Smoking and Vaping in Scotland

Scotland mirrors some of these national trends but also exhibits distinct characteristics. In 2023, 15% of Scottish adults identified as current smokers, consistent with the previous year's data. E-cigarette or vaping device usage among adults increased from 10% in 2022 to 12% in 2023, with the highest prevalence (22%) observed among individuals aged 16-24. This rise in vaping among younger adults highlights a shift in nicotine consumption patterns within the region.

Geographical disparities are evident, with smoking rates highest in Scotland's most deprived areas (26%) and lowest in the least deprived areas (6%). Similarly, e-cigarette usage follows this pattern, with 17% of adults in the most deprived

areas using vaping devices compared to 6% in the least deprived regions. These statistics underscore the intersection of socioeconomic factors and nicotine use, suggesting that public health interventions may need to be tailored to address these disparities effectively.

Another challenge unique to Scotland is the relatively higher rate of smoking among individuals with mental health conditions. Research has shown that smoking prevalence among individuals with depression and anxiety disorders remains significantly higher than in the general population. This highlights the need for targeted cessation programs that address both nicotine dependence and mental health support in an integrated manner.

Youth Vaping Concerns

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The rise in vaping among Scottish youth has become a pressing public health concern. In 2024, 18.8% of individuals aged 11-17 reported having tried vaping, with 7.4% identifying as current vapers. Alarming, 4.6% of this age group are regular vapers, engaging in the activity more than once a week. These figures indicate a significant increase in vaping experimentation and regular use among adolescents, raising questions about the long-term health implications and the potential for nicotine addiction.

In response to these trends, the Scottish government has implemented measures to curb youth vaping. Notably, a ban on disposable vapes was enacted on June 1, 2024, aiming to reduce the appeal and accessibility of vaping products to minors. Additionally, over the past two years, more than 1,000 prescriptions for Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) have been issued to minors, reflecting efforts to address nicotine dependence among young people.

Public health experts argue that more comprehensive strategies

are needed to address youth vaping. Educational campaigns targeting school-age children, stronger enforcement of retail restrictions, and stricter marketing regulations could help mitigate the rise in adolescent nicotine use.

Public Health Implications

Smoking remains a leading cause of preventable deaths in Scotland, contributing to over 8,000 fatalities in 2022. The persistent prevalence of smoking, particularly in deprived areas, exacerbates health inequalities across the nation. The rapid rise of youth vaping adds another layer of complexity, with concerns about unknown long-term health outcomes and the potential for e-cigarettes to serve as a gateway to traditional tobacco use.

Public health organizations, such as [ASH Scotland](#), advocate for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges. Recommendations include targeted education campaigns, stricter enforcement of age restrictions on vaping product sales, and support for cessation programs tailored to diverse populations.

The landscape of smoking and vaping in Britain, and particularly in Scotland, is evolving. While progress has been made in reducing smoking rates, the rise in vaping, especially among youth, presents new public health challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that considers regional disparities, socioeconomic factors, and the unique needs of different demographic groups. By implementing targeted interventions and fostering collaboration between government agencies, healthcare providers, and communities, Scotland can work towards reducing nicotine dependence and promoting a healthier future for all its residents.

The Scottish government's current efforts in banning disposable vapes and increasing public awareness are steps in the right direction, but continued research, investment in

smoking cessation resources, and policy adaptation will be crucial in shaping a healthier future for all. The challenge now is ensuring that policies do not simply restrict access but actively provide the necessary support for individuals to transition away from nicotine use successfully.