Why vaping should not be included in smoke-free environments

Introduction: Smoke-free environments and vaping

Smoke-free environments were created to protect non-smokers from secondhand smoke, which contains harmful chemicals, including carcinogens, derived from the combustion of tobacco. However, vaping is substantially different from smoking. The vapour produced by heating the e-liquid is harmless in comparison to the smoke produced by combustible cigarettes, and secondhand vaping has been shown to pose no significant risk to bystanders.

Vaping vs. smoking: key differences

- **Safer ingredients**: Vape liquids are made of water, nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin and flavourings, compounds commonly found in food ingredients deemed safe and not harmful by regulatory bodies including the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Cigarettes, meanwhile, contain over 600 ingredients, some of which are toxic.
- **No combustion**: Smoking involves burning tobacco, which releases thousands of toxic chemicals, many of which are carcinogenic, including tar and carbon monoxide. Vaping, by contrast, involves heating the e-liquid to produce vapour without combustion.

Secondhand vaping: negligible health risks

Vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking as well as the most effective smoking cessation method. The exposure to toxicants that promote cancer, lung disease and cardiovascular disease in the use of vaping products is substantially lower than that of smoking, with the risk of cancer from vaping being only 0.4% of that from smoking.

These differences in the health risks of vaping and smoking for users are even greater for bystanders. When a person vapes, the device produces a vapour that is inhaled directly into the lungs, but no vapour is produced between puffs. Some of the vapour is exhaled by the user after each puff and released into the environment, but it exposes bystanders only to nicotine - a virtually harmless substance - and not to combustion toxicants. On the contrary, cigarettes constantly release smoke into the environment when lit and expose bystanders to harm. Moreover, the exposure to nicotine from secondhand vaping has been found to be negligible.

These differences between secondhand vaping and smoking reflect there is no scientific basis for banning vaping in public spaces for health reasons.

Encouraging smokers to switch

One of the primary goals of smoke-free policies is to encourage smokers to quit. Vaping serves as an [effective](#) harm reduction tool, helping smokers quit and consume nicotine in a substantially healthier manner.

Treating vaping the same as smoking removes an important incentive for smokers to switch and undermines harm reduction strategies. By allowing vaping in areas where smoking is banned, policymakers can:

- **Promote harm reduction**: Create a visible distinction between smoking and vaping, signalling to smokers that vaping is a much safer option.
- **Encourage smoking cessation**: Offering smokers an alternative that is allowed in more spaces helps make quitting more appealing.

Different products, different Regulations

Vaping is a substantially less harmful alternative to smoking, and secondhand vapour poses no significant health risks to bystanders. Including vaping in smoke-free environments would remove an important tool for harm reduction.

The European Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on smoke and aerosol-environments should differentiate between vaping and smoking, supporting vaping as a less harmful alternative for those trying to quit smoking.

Including vaping in smoke-free regulations would undermine public health goals. The update of the Council's recommendation offers a critical opportunity to support harm reduction by excluding vaping from such restrictions. Doing so would:

- **Acknowledge scientific evidence**: Recognizing that vaping is less harmful than smoking and that secondhand vapour is not harmful, admitting that there is no evidence to justify treating vaping and smoking the same.
- **Support public health**: Allowing vaping in public spaces where smoking is banned incentivizes smokers to switch to a safer alternative, reducing smoking rates and improving overall health outcomes.

By allowing vaping in spaces where smoking is banned, policymakers can encourage more smokers to switch, leading to lower smoking rates, lower smoking-related illnesses and deaths, and better public health results.