



 <p>GIG CYMRU NHS WALES Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales</p>	<p>Name of Meeting Board Date of Meeting 30 May 2024 Agenda item: 3.2</p>
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Incident Response Group – Vaping and Young People

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Approval/Scrutiny route:	Jim McManus, National Director of Health and Wellbeing Business Executive Team (15 May 2024)
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<p>Purpose</p> <p>Following concerns from professionals and the public over rapid rises in vaping prevalence amongst children and young people in Wales, Public Health Wales convened an Incident Response Group. The IRG applied an outbreak control model to drive rapid, evidence-based development of consensus and recommendations.</p> <p>The purpose of this paper is to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a brief overview of the rationale for this approach • an evaluation of effectiveness • a summary of learning • potential future applications <p>To our knowledge this is the first time an Incident Response model has been applied to a prevention challenge of this kind and at this scale. The Board is asked to consider the learning from this approach including potential for further development to support the organisation’s continued effectiveness in rapidly addressing emerging issues of public health concern.</p> <p>The final report of the Outbreak Response Group in Cymraeg is available here https://icc.gig.cymru/newyddion1/ewch-ir-afael-a-dibyniaeth-gwelededd-ac-argaeledd-er-mwyn-mynd-ir-afael-ar-cynnydd-cyflym-mewn-fepio-ymlith-pobl-ifanc-meddai-arbenigwyr-iechyd-cyhoeddus/fepio-ymlith-plant-a-phobl-ifanc-yng-nghymru/</p>



The final report of the Outbreak Response Group in English is available here phw.nhs.wales/news/tackle-dependency-visibility-and-availability-to-address-rapid-rise-in-youth-vaping-say-public-health-experts/vaping-amongst-children-and-young-people-in-wales-incident-response-group-report/

Recommendation:

APPROVE

CONSIDER

RECOMMEND

ADOPT

ASSURANCE

The Board is asked to consider the report and the work undertaken to date and its potential future application in supporting the delivery of our Long Term Strategy.



Link to Public Health Wales [Strategic Plan](#)

Public Health Wales has an agreed strategic plan, which has identified seven strategic priorities and well-being objectives.

This report contributes to the following:

Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective	3 - Promoting healthy behaviours
Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective	4 - Delivering excellent public health services

Summary impact analysis

Equality and Health Impact Assessment	This paper describes work that has already been completed and learning gained. There are no issues relevant to an EHIA.
Risk and Assurance	Not applicable
Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act	This work supports implementation of the Duty of Quality by taking a person-centred approach. The worked engaged directly with young people and with schools to gather information about their experiences and needs with respect to vaping and these were central to formulating recommendations. The work also took a whole system approach engaging partners from across the system in seeking a consensus view on the proposed response to the issue based on the best available evidence.
Financial implications	There are no financial implications
People implications	None



1. Purpose / situation

During Spring and Early Summer 2023 the Health Improvement Division became aware of increasing concerns across the system relating to the rise in vaping by young people. This impact was particularly being felt in the education system and was highlighted by Headteachers as a primary area of concern with the then Minister for Education and Welsh Language.

Welsh Government Policy colleagues asked for support in addressing the issue and this led to a proposal to explore a different approach in a non-communicable disease context, drawing on learning from health protection incidents. An outline proposal was taken to Welsh Government, Directors of Public Health, Directors of Public Protection and received support.

Between July and November 2023, Public Health Wales convened and led an Incident Response Group (IRG) which used an outbreak control model to rapidly:

- investigate the substantial rise of vaping amongst children and young people in Wales
- make recommendations to protect the health of this group

The IRG published its report on 18 April 2024 ([Cymraeg](#) / [English](#)).

2. Background

During the first six months of 2023 the Health Improvement Division was receiving an increasing number of reports from stakeholders linked with Healthy Schools, the Help Me Quit service and Health Board tobacco control teams that rates of vaping amongst children and young people were rising rapidly and that this group was experiencing health and wellbeing harms as a result. Media coverage articulated increasing public uncertainty and anxiety and Welsh Government expressed concerns at ministerial level.

Working with Health Protection colleagues with experience of applying incident management approaches to address unanticipated changes in non-communicable disease incidence, an outbreak control model was adopted to address the situation. An Incident Response Group (IRG), led by Public Health Wales was convened for the first time on 6 July 2023.

The rationale for the IRG model was to enable a rapid and systematic approach that co-ordinated stakeholders to drive evidence-based development of consensus recommendations.

The IRG brought together representatives of key stakeholder groups and professionals with direct experience of working with children and young people.



These included the Association of Directors of Education in Wales, Directors of Public Health, Trading Standards Wales, Respiratory and Paediatric Clinicians, Youth Services, Further Education, the third sector, teachers and youth workers. PHW teams including Health Improvement, Health Protection, Environmental Public Health and Communications were involved. A number of bodies, including Welsh Government and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner attended with observer status.

The Group met eight times between July and November 2023. In line with the outbreak control model set out in the [Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales](#), an initial epidemiological report was reviewed, an incident was defined in relation to this issue and declared by the Group. Further field investigations were agreed, rapidly carried out and reported back to the Group. These included rapid school surveys of learners and school management teams and focus group work carried out by the HI Division Research and Evaluation Team to gain insights into the practices and perceptions of children and young people around vaping.

3. Description/Assessment

The IRG was structured to closely reflect the outbreak control model, with a rapid cycle of meetings defining investigations, reviewing evidence and agreeing consensus statements on the evidence and proposed control measures. Control measures included guidance on supporting children and young people who were vaping and a

Although a limited literature exists on applying outbreak control models to changes in non-communicable disease incidence, application to rapidly emerging or changing behaviours of public health concern represented a novel approach.

A number of learning points have already emerged from this work and were included in the final report. These included:

- Getting the right people in the room for the duration: members need to be committed, expert and able to credibly represent stakeholders in their professional field
- It is critical to recognise and address uncertainty and disagreement constructively
- Recognise the substantial resource needs and identify accordingly
- Continual defining and refining communications strategy and messaging is necessary

A full case review with Consultant-level contributors across Public Health Wales and Health Boards is planned for May 2024.



As a novel approach, the Incident Response Group delivered a number of benefits which would have been difficult or impossible to realise using other methods:

- The IRG model created focus and momentum amongst a large and disparate group of senior stakeholders which in turn supported the creation of consensus and the rapid delivery of work. Specifically, the rapid cycles of meetings with agreed evidence to review, the clear boundaries provided by the case definition and the use of terms and formats from outbreak control (e.g. 'investigations', 'control measures'). This is evidenced by the continued prioritisation of IRG meetings by senior members of contributing organisations
- The IRG was able to create a body of agreed evidence that could be used in multiple settings and mediums, supporting consistency and strategic messaging across a landscape characterised initially by uncertainty and confusion in within which motivated commercial actors are also strategically active
- By leading stakeholder co-ordination and rapid mobilisation of public health expertise, PHW built consensus in a space in which evidence can be limited and policy options are frequently contested. This is evidenced by the fact that, despite clear and reasoned differences in interpretation of evidence and options between Group members, a set of consensus statements were agreed unanimously and only two stakeholders dissented from one of the control measures, and both remained in the process
- Rapidly deploying 'field' investigations was an effective way not only of producing evidence for action but also of quantifying and therefore managing uncertainty. Developing this 'field social epidemiology' by integrating approaches and techniques used in outbreak management and methods for understanding the influences of social phenomena on health behaviours would support capacity to respond to future emerging behaviours of public health concern. The work produced by these rapidly mobilised investigations gave the IRG confidence in developing clear evidence statements. This work continues to be used by public health stakeholders to describe the current state of knowledge of vaping in this group, as it remains the most up-to-date evidence
- The process followed by the IRG permitted the gathering and sharing of evidence rapidly across a broad range of specialist topics whilst maintaining an appropriate integrity and rigour. Topics covered included prevalence, patterns and inequalities in use, harms, social and psychological drivers, the developing commercial landscape including the illegal market, environmental impacts and legal and policy contexts. This is evidenced by the fact that less than two weeks after final publication, an oral presentation and poster have



already been presented at a major Public Health Conference and further conference and journal submissions are planned

Public health Wales has repeatedly documented in recent years how changes across social, economic, commercial and social landscapes can have rapid and sometimes unexpected impacts on public health. These impacts are frequently accompanied by uncertainty, misinformation and demands for action.

There will be a full review of the approach which will enable us to make recommendations on how this way of working might be adopted in the future and provide some guidance on the approach. The learning to date suggests its greatest application will be in responding to changes in population health indicators for which an obvious cause is not apparent and where multi-agency cross system engagement is necessary.

4. Recommendation

The Incident Response Group model provided an innovative and successful approach to addressing an issue of emerging public health concern and in generating cross sector recommendations for response.

The Board is asked to:

- **consider** the report and the work undertaken to date and its potential future application in supporting the delivery of our Long Term Strategy