

No smoke without a fire? Controversy over flavoured vapes

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Juul, the ‘iPhone of e-cigarettes’¹ maintains that its flavoured ‘vapes’ are safe to use in the UK, despite concerns over a ‘mysterious lung illness’ that has led to over 20 deaths and more than a thousand medical cases in the US.²

Seen as an alternative to cigarettes, Juul insists its target market is smokers trying to quit, but this has not stopped accusations that it has been targeting young people with its fruity flavoured vapes.³ (The proportion of young people who have not smoked, but vaped has increased in the UK.)⁴

Juul was worth more than \$38 billion dollars at the start of the year,⁵ with ‘to juul’ a verb in high schools across America, where vaping has reached epidemic proportions.⁶ Efforts have begun to curb the company’s influence on teenagers.

A ban on flavoured e-cigarettes has been announced in the USA⁷ and India⁸ with both Scotland⁹ and Ireland¹⁰ drawing up their own measures.

Juul, using its own research conducted by the Centre for Substance Use Research in Glasgow, found that non-tobacco flavours helped smokers move away from cigarettes by 30%.¹¹ While *their* evidence may suggest that vaping helps long-term smokers break the habit, the question of whether vaping is safe is another matter.¹²

Public Health England has insisted that vaping is 95% safer than smoking and that the ‘mysterious lung illness’ is largely linked to the vaping of cannabis substances.¹³ But only time will tell the effect that vaping has on its users, and whether this vaping controversy evaporates into thin air.¹⁴

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Abortion in Northern Ireland Devolving the problem?

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After a breakdown in the power-sharing agreement at Stormont in January 2017, Westminster has been caretaking ever since, and has been in power ever since. In July 2019, MPs at Westminster passed the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Bill, designed ‘to keep public services running and delay another assembly election’.¹ However, amendments liberalising Northern Ireland’s homosexual marriage and abortion laws were also tacked on to the Bill, which was to come into effect on 21 October 2019 if a Stormont Executive had not been reinstated.

Despite the valiant efforts of Christians and other pro-life campaigners, a last-minute attempt to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly broke down, and the Bill was enacted.

The section of the Bill affecting abortion repeals Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and thus decriminalises abortion, at least up to the

point of viability (currently set at 28 weeks).² This makes it one of the most liberal abortion laws in Europe.

Worse still, new regulations will not be put in place until 31 March 2020, meaning that ‘there will be no limitations on where abortions can take place, no requirements for abortion providers to be inspected and no notification requirements for at least the next five months’.³ During this period, women requesting abortions will be directed to travel to England for the procedure. All costs, including travel and any necessary accommodation will be covered.⁴

The government’s guidance for the interim period states that ‘consideration is being given to providing for conscientious objection in the new legal framework from the end of March 2020’.⁵ What of conscientious objection between now and then? The guidelines simply state that in the interim period, ‘anyone who has a conscientious objection to abortion may want to raise this with their employer.’ This means there is currently ‘no explicit legal protection for

medical professionals who conscientiously object to abortion’.⁶

In other words, on 21 October a doctor could have been prosecuted for terminating the life of a healthy, unborn baby; today he or she could face GMC referral for refusing to.

CMF is continuing to watch developments closely. Our support is with our members in Northern Ireland as they navigate this brave new world.

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