



In Focus

Smoking-Related Diseases: Government Action

Smoking and Ill Health

On 14 September 2016, the House of Lords will debate what further action the Government is taking to reduce the incidence of smoking-related diseases. The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) estimates that 476,000 people were admitted to hospital for conditions caused by smoking in 2014–15.¹ In 2014, an estimated 78,000 deaths, it said, were attributable to smoking. The NHS explains that smoking can affect many aspects of a smoker's health, including the circulatory system, stomach, skin, bone density, brain, mouth and throat, fertility and lungs.² It has estimated that smoking causes 84 percent of deaths from lung cancer and 83 percent of deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.³ However, the prevalence of smoking is decreasing, according to the HSCIC. In 1974, an estimated 46 percent of adults in Great Britain smoked: in 2014 this figure stood at 19 percent.⁴

Government Policies

Tobacco Control Strategy and Standardised Packaging

In March 2011, the Coalition Government published [Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England](#) which set out government plans to help reduce tobacco use over the next five years, within the context of the new public health system. Describing tobacco as “one of our most significant public health challenges” the plan committed to a number of measures in order to reduce tobacco usage.⁵ These included the implementation of section 21 of the Health Act 2009 to end the display of tobacco products in shops and to examine whether plain packaging of tobacco products could be effective in reducing the uptake of smoking by new smokers and help existing smokers to quit more easily.

Standardised packaging for tobacco products was introduced by the [Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015](#), which came into force on 20 May 2016. The introduction of these regulations followed a [public consultation in 2012](#), followed by an [independent review](#) into the issue which commenced on 28 November 2013, conducted by Sir Cyril Chantler. Prior to the publishing of the review, regulation making powers to introduce standardised packaging were added to Children and Families Bill (in the 2013–14 session). The Bill received royal assent on 13 March 2014. The Chantler review was published shortly afterwards on 3 April 2014. It found that “branded packaging contributes to increased tobacco consumption” and, although it did not see evidence that would allow it to quantify the size of the probable impact of standardised packaging, the review was satisfied that it was “very likely to lead to a modest but important reduction over time on the uptake and prevalence of smoking and thus have a positive impact on public health”.⁶

On 17 December 2015, the House of Commons considered a new tobacco control plan in a debate in Westminster Hall.⁷ Responding to the debate, Jane Ellison, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, confirmed that the Government was working on a new plan to be published in Summer 2016.⁸ She stated that the Government would seek to “further empower local areas and support action

within them, particularly where tobacco control strategies can be tailored to the unique needs of local populations”.⁹ The Government would also seek to tackle the “stark differences” in health outcomes amongst smokers from different areas of the country. The new plan has yet to be published. In answer to a written question on 25 July 2016, following Theresa May becoming Prime Minister, the Government confirmed that it “remains committed to publishing a new tobacco control plan and Ministers will decide on a publication date shortly”.¹⁰

Smoking Cessation Aids and ‘Reduced Harm’ Products

The Government has stated that “for the first time, from May 2016, cessation information to signpost consumers to quitting support has become mandatory on tobacco products” (following the [Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016](#)).¹¹ The Government argues that the personalised support available from local stop smoking services remains the best route to smokers quitting. However, it has said that the forthcoming tobacco control plan “will consider the role of e-cigarettes and other harm reduction products in further reducing the prevalence of smoking in England”. The Government has said that whilst it believes that e-cigarettes can help smokers quit smoking such devices are “not harmless and there is a lack of evidence on their effects in long term use”. Therefore, the Department of Health would continue to assess evidence in developing future policies on e-cigarettes. The Government has said that it has no current plans to ban the use of e-cigarettes in public places in England.¹²

Further Information

- NHS Smokefree, ‘[Support Services](#)’, accessed 10 August 2016
- Public Health England, ‘[Guidance: Health Matters: Smoking and Quitting in England](#)’, 15 September 2015
- Health and Social Care Information Centre, [Statistics on Smoking: England 2016](#), 27 May 2016
- House of Commons Library, [Statistics on Smoking](#), 7 July 2016
- House of Commons Library, [Prohibition of Tobacco Display in Shops](#), 15 December 2015
- House of Commons Library, [Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products](#), 22 January 2015
- Action on Smoking and Health, [Standardised Tobacco Packaging](#), May 2016
- Forest, ‘[Opponents of Plain Packaging Invoke Spirit of Churchill](#)’, 17 May 2016
- [Debate on ‘Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016’](#), *HL Hansard*, 4 July 2016, cols 1806–31
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), [Electronic Cigarettes](#), 8 August 2016

¹ Health and Social Care Information Centre, [Statistics on Smoking: England 2016](#), 27 May 2016, p 2.

² NHS Smokefree, ‘[How Smoking Affects Your Body](#)’, accessed 3 August 2016.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Health and Social Care Information Centre, [Statistics on Smoking: England 2016](#), 27 May 2016, p 7.

⁵ HM Government, [Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England](#), 9 March 2011, p 5.

⁶ Sir Cyril Chantler, [Standardised Packaging of Tobacco](#), April 2014, pp 4 and 6.

⁷ [Westminster Hall Debate on ‘Tobacco Control Strategy’](#), *HC Hansard*, 17 December 2015, cols 613–40WH.

⁸ *ibid.*, [col 634WH](#).

⁹ *ibid.*, [col 635WH](#).

¹⁰ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Tobacco](#)’, 25 July 2016, 43383.

¹¹ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Tobacco](#)’, 12 July 2016, 42183.

¹² House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Electronic Cigarettes: Public Places](#)’, 11 July 2016, 41909.

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