



Protecting children from tobacco marketing: the facts and the fiction about plain packaging of tobacco products

About Cancer Research UK:

- Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to saving lives through research.
- We spent £332m on research in 2010/11 and we receive no government funding for our research.
- Through research and advocacy to reduce the harm caused by tobacco, we have played a substantial part in securing the ban on tobacco advertising, smokefree workplaces and the laws to remove displays of tobacco in shops and cigarette vending machines.

Why are plain packs needed?

Plain packaging is needed to **reduce the attractiveness of tobacco products to children**.

The evidence demonstrates that tobacco branding works in three key ways:

- Packets are designed to be attractive and communicate the 'personality' of a brand. They can act as 'badge products' and an extension of a person's identity.
- Lighter packaging colours mislead customers, suggesting some products are healthier than others.
- Packets with branding reduce the prominence and effectiveness of health warnings.

Eight out of ten smokers start by the age of 19¹. Addiction keeps them smoking into adulthood where it kills one in two long-term users². Marketing is known to pull children into smoking³ and the pack is just another marketing tool⁴. Children should be protected from the marketing of a highly addictive and seriously harmful product. Plain packaging is needed because it will contribute to this protection.

Cancer Research UK's position:

- The Government should proceed with its consultation of plain packaging for tobacco products and then move to implementation as swiftly as possible.
- Plain packaging should be introduced alongside the removal of tobacco displays in shops as the two measures have different aims. Tobacco displays reinforce social norms of smoking amongst young people. Plain packaging makes the pack less attractive and health warnings more prominent to children.

The burden of tobacco:

- Smoking remains the largest preventable cause of cancer, causing one in four deaths from cancer and up to eight out of ten cases of lung cancer. Overall, 100,000 deaths are caused by tobacco each year in the UK⁵.
- The UK has made a lot of progress,⁶ but one in five adults still smoke⁷ and hundreds of thousands of teenagers try smoking every year⁸.

What are plain packs?

Plain packaging means all cigarette packs look the same. They are packaged in a standard shape without branding, design or logo. Pictured (right) is an example of the packs Australia plans to introduce.

- Health warnings remain
- Brand name in standard type face, colour and size
- Standardised shape, colour and method of opening the packet
- Duty paid stamp remains with covert markings that show the pack is not counterfeit
- Cigarettes are also standardised in size and colour





What impact does lighter coloured packaging have on young people's perception of how harmful a tobacco product is?

Plain packaging leads to fewer people falsely believing that lighter colours are healthier than others. Adults and young people (11-17 year olds) are significantly more likely to rate 'silver' and 'gold' packs as lower tar, lower health risk and either easier to quit in the case of adults, or as their choice of product if trying smoking amongst teenagers^{9 10 11}.

What impact does branding have on the effectiveness of health warnings?

Plain packaging improves the prominence and effectiveness of health warnings. Decreasing the extent of branding on tobacco packaging increases the deterrent effect of current health warnings as does increasing the size of warnings. For example, one study found that out of 13 options, plain packs with large warnings were significantly more likely to elicit cessation-related behaviours than branded packs with small warnings^{12 13 14 15}.

What is the relationship between a smoker and their packet of cigarettes?

The brand a person chooses to smoke becomes part of their identity. Cigarette brands can be 'badge products' that serve as social cues to style, status, values and character. The tobacco industry is aware of this relationship:

*"... if you smoke, a cigarette pack is one of the few things you use regularly that makes a statement about you. A cigarette pack is the only thing you take out of your pocket 20 times a day and lay out for everyone to see."*¹⁶

What is the impact of plain packaging on young people's perceptions of cigarettes?

A study comparing existing branded cigarette packs with plain cardboard packs bearing the name and number of cigarettes in small standard font, found plain packs to be significantly less attractive^{17 18 19}.

Research asking young adults to use plain cigarette packs and subsequently questioning them about their feelings towards them, confirmed findings that standardised packaging enhanced negative perceptions and feelings about the pack and about smoking. Additionally, it increased avoidant behaviour (hiding or covering pack, smoking less around others, forgoing cigarettes, increased thinking about quitting). Almost half of the participants reported that plain packs had either increased avoidant behaviour or reduced consumption²⁰.

What does the tobacco industry really think about plain packaging?

Tobacco manufacturers have increasingly focused on packaging design to make their products more appealing²¹.

An internal Philip Morris presentation said: *"Our final communication vehicle with our smokers is the pack itself. In the absence of any other marketing messages, our packaging... is the sole communicator of our brand essence. Put another way: When you don't have anything else, our packaging is our marketing."*²²

A leading industry analyst has estimated that plain packaging will halve tobacco industry profit margins²³ so it is not surprising that Philip Morris has stated *"we don't want to see plain packaging introduced anywhere regardless of the size and importance of the market."*²⁴

What has been the tobacco industry's response to the advertising ban from 2002?

Since the introduction of the tobacco advertising ban in 2002 the tobacco industry has had to explore new avenues to promote its products. One prime route was via tobacco displays in shops with almost half (46%) of teenagers being aware of tobacco marketing at the point of sale²⁵. These displays also influence teenagers' perception of smoking as a normal, adult activity²⁶. Tobacco displays will be removed from large shops in April 2012 and from small



shops from April 2015 in England. But the packaging will remain a marketing tool for the tobacco industry to utilise.

Since 1998 tobacco manufacturers have increased their ranges within brands or 'brand families' by more than 100% with popular brands like Benson and Hedges increasing their brand family from four in 1998 to twelve in 2008²⁷. Between 2002 and 2006, the proportion of young people aware of new pack designs rose from 11% in 2002 to 18% in 2006²⁸. To complement the removal of tobacco displays, the introduction of plain packaging is needed.

Tobacco is a legal product – why should it be treated differently?

Tobacco is the only consumer product that when used as instructed, kills one in two of its long-term users²⁹. Tobacco is unique and should be treated differently to other products.

Who backs plain packaging?

- Eight out of ten people tell YouGov they would support plain packs if there is evidence they are less attractive to young people than branded packs³⁰.
- Australia is introducing plain packaging in December. The Tobacco Plain Packaging Bill received cross-party backing and was passed unanimously through the Australian House of Representatives³¹.
- The UK could be the first country in Europe to benefit from plain packaging. France,³² New Zealand³³, Turkey³⁴, Brunei³⁵ and Hong Kong³⁶ are all reviewing the policy.

Why not wait and see what happens in Australia?

We would lose out on the benefits of plain packaging in reducing the attractiveness of cigarettes. When 100,000 deaths a year are due to tobacco, missing an opportunity to help reduce smoking has very serious costs.

What are the myths the tobacco industry promotes?

Fiction: *It will take longer to serve customers in convenience shops as assistants will not so easily be able to locate different brands, meaning people go to larger shops.*

Fact: Peer-reviewed research³⁷ shows it is likely that plain packs improve transaction times and shop assistants will locate the right packs more reliably. Qualitative research suggests this is because colours and logos can distract staff. It also showed that it is easy for servers to go from branded to plain packs.

The removal of tobacco displays in shops was alleged to have a similar effect, i.e. that shop assistants cannot use the colours of the brands to locate stock. However, peer-reviewed research from Ireland has found no economic impact on small shops³⁸.

With the aim of reducing the numbers of teenagers who start smoking, the removal of tobacco displays and plain packaging have a long-term effect on cigarette sales meaning shops have time to adapt.

Fiction: *Plain packs are easier to forge so smuggling will rise.*

Fact: The existing packs are already so easy to forge that they have covert markings to enable enforcement officials to distinguish illicit cigarettes³⁹. With these markings and large pictorial warnings packs will not be easier to forge.

The tobacco industry exaggerates the scale of smuggling⁴⁰. While still a problem, it has halved since its peak to 10% for cigarettes. This is due to better enforcement by government agencies and strict curbs on the tobacco industry's own activities as they have a poor record on smuggling. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, most illicit cigarettes were genuine products manufactured in the UK, exported to continental Europe and then smuggled back to the UK. For example, Andorra was supplied by tobacco companies with 3.1 billion

cigarettes in 1997 - equivalent to every Andorran smoking seven packets a day. These were then smuggled back to the UK⁴¹.

During an investigation into tobacco smuggling by the Public Accounts Committee, the present Chancellor, George Osborne MP, said in exasperation to senior executives of Imperial Tobacco:

“One comes to the conclusion that you are either crooks or you are stupid, and you do not look very stupid. How can you possibly have sold cigarettes to Latvia, Kaliningrad, Afghanistan and Moldova in the expectation that those were just going to be used by the indigenous population or exported legitimately to neighbouring countries, and not in the expectation they would be smuggled?”⁴²

Fiction: *Cigarette prices will fall as this is the only way for companies to compete, meaning more young people will start smoking.*

Fact: If there is a reduction in price then taxes can be raised to compensate. The difference in price between cigarettes in the UK and illicit tobacco would not significantly change.

Fiction: *Plain packaging is confiscating the property of tobacco companies and could result in significant legal and compensation costs for governments.*

Fact: The trademarks are not being acquired by anyone – it is just their use that is being restricted. International treaties on intellectual property have opt-outs for public health⁴³.

For more information please contact publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk.

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² <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving/smokingandtobacco/howdoweknow/>

³ For a discussion, see Chapter 2 of: Hastings, G et al. (2008) Point of Sale Display of Tobacco Products. The Centre for Tobacco Control Research, University of Stirling.

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⁴ Hastings G, Galopel-Morvan K, Rey JM. The plain truth about tobacco packaging. Tobacco Control 2008;17:361-362

⁵ <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving/smokingandtobacco/howdoweknow/>

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⁷ Statistics on Smoking: England, 2011. (2011) Health and Social Care Information Centre, Leeds.

⁸ Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2008 full report. (2009) NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care, Leeds.

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¹² Hoek J, Wong C, Glendall P, et al Effects of dissuasive packaging on young adult smokers. Tobacco Control published online October 21, 2010 doi: 10.1136/tc.2010.037861

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¹⁶ Speech notes from T.E. Sandefur, President of Brown and Williamson (a subsidiary of British American Tobacco), 1985. Bates no. 52001904/1918. Available at: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/action/document/page?tid=noi24f00>

¹⁷ Wakefield MA, Letcher T. My pack is cuter than your pack. Tobacco Control. 2002 11: 154-156

¹⁸ Wakefield MA, Germain D, Durkin SJ. How does increasingly plainer cigarette packaging influence adult smokers' perceptions about brand image? An experimental study. Tobacco Control. 2008 Dec;17(6):416-21

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- ²² Hult M. Presentation at the May 17, 1994 Corporate Affairs Conference: Marketing Issues (internal industry document.) Philip Morris. 1994. Bates No. Bates No. 2504015017/5042. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/jga42e00>
- ²³ 'Little hope in appealing to natural justice' *Tobacco Journal International*. (2 September 2008) Interview with Adam Spielman of Citigroup. http://www.tobaccojournal.com/Little_hope_in_appealing_to_natural_justice.49195.0.html
- ²⁴ <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/ft22e00/pdf.jsessionid=F7268D7DBD41EDB7FB86ECFFE392F8A2.tobacco03>
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Examples of some existing
cigarette packets

