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Vaping: Free e-cigarettes to be handed out in anti-smoking drive

One million smokers will be given a free vaping starter kit to encourage them to give up tobacco products.

Pregnant women will also be offered up to £400 to stop smoking as part of a package of measures in England unveiled by the government on Tuesday.

A consultation will be launched on compelling cigarette manufacturers to put advice on quitting inside packs. But charities have warned swapping cigarettes for vapes is "nowhere near sufficient" in tackling addiction.

The government has committed to getting smoking rates in England below 5% by 2030. The plans also include a crackdown on underage and illicit vape sales. Almost one in five smokers in England will receive a kit alongside behavioral support, the government said.

In a speech on Tuesday, health minister Neil O'Brien described the free vape policy - dubbed "swap to stop" - as the first of its kind in the world. "Up to two out of three lifelong smokers will die from smoking. Cigarettes are the only product on sale which will kill you if used correctly," he said.

Mr O'Brien also ruled out raising the minimum age for the sale of cigarettes from 18. Instead, policies will focus on "helping people to quit" rather than imposing bans, he said.

Last year, a major review led by Dr Javed Khan called for the minimum age to be increased by one year, every year "until no one can buy a tobacco product in this country". MPs from the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health have previously recommended hiking the age of sale to 21.

It is estimated that 9% of women still smoke during pregnancy in England, and the government says local trials indicate that financial incentives and behavioural support can be effective.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said it would set out details on how this scheme will work "in due course".

Local authorities are being invited to join the first wave of areas

taking part in the free vape policy, before a larger national scheme is rolled out over the next two years.

Officials estimate it will cost around £45m and is set to be funded from the health department's budget, but administered by local authorities.

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of the Action on Smoking and Health campaign, said the policy announcements are "welcome steps in the right direction". But she warned the moves are "nowhere near sufficient" as the target date for England becoming "smoke free" by 2030 nears.

She said: "Vapes increase smokers' chances of successfully quitting, as do vouchers for pregnant smokers, so these are welcome steps in the right direction, but they are nowhere near sufficient."

Sarah MacFadyen, from charity Asthma and Lung UK, said tackling addiction was more complex than just swapping cigarettes for vapes, saying "what smokers need is to stop smoking services offering personalized support".

In 2019, ministers pledged to end smoking - defined as getting rates below 5% - by the end of the decade. As of 2021, smoking prevalence in England was 13%, the lowest on record. But a review of the 2030 target published last year warned it will be missed by at least seven years without further action.

Its author, Dr Khan, called for a range of new measures, including a ban on smoking at outdoor spaces such as beaches and beer gardens.

The same report recommended promoting vaping as an alternative to tobacco, but said e-cigarettes are not a "silver bullet" or "totally risk free". While the government wants to encourage adult smokers to swap cigarettes for vapes, there are concerns about the rising popularity of the products among children.

NHS figures released last year revealed 9% of secondary school

pupils use a vape regularly or occasionally, including almost one in five 15-year-olds.

The government announced that it is setting up a new trading standards enforcement squad to crack down on vapes being sold illegally to under-18s. A full consultation on how young people can be discouraged from taking up the habit is also being launched on Tuesday.

Other countries are taking different approaches to e-cigarettes and smoking - with many countries banning vaping, including Thailand, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Iran, India and Argentina.

According to the Australian government website, it is illegal to possess or use any nicotine vaping products without a prescription from a doctor. It is also illegal to smoke cigarettes and e-cigarettes in enclosed public places such as trains, planes and buses.

Meanwhile, Turkey has banned the sales of e-cigarettes although it is not actually illegal to vape in the country.

https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65235343?fbclid=IwAR3n4in-V_drqVWoF2UbA6XeohYcY18mmhCG7dTe-dtakJW_tv6nrX0y_SNE

Altria Survey: Majority of Americans support tobacco harm reduction

RICHMOND, Va. — Americans are in favor of tobacco harm reduction over prohibition as public policy, according to the results of a new survey released by Altria Group Inc. Results show that two in three Americans support harm reduction, a public health strategy that supports transitioning adult smokers who can't or won't stop smoking to less-risky tobacco products, over blanket prohibition as the better policy approach to tobacco regulations. Additionally, more than eight in 10 Americans (82 percent) think it is important for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to focus on making smoke-free tobacco products available to adult smokers to help them switch from cigarettes.

"There is clear, overwhelming support for the FDA embracing harm reduction for the 30 million American adults who smoke. That means providing adult smokers who are unable or unwilling to quit with wider access to smoke-free alternatives and providing them the information and support to help them switch," said Paige Magness, senior vice

president, regulatory affairs, Altria Client Services. "Pursuing harm reduction is one of the most powerful steps the FDA can take to deliver on its mission to reduce tobacco-related death and disease in the U.S. It is our hope that the FDA will listen to these voices as it sets out its policy agenda for the coming years."

Ninety percent of Americans agree that the FDA has a responsibility to accurately inform adult tobacco consumers about the risks associated with different tobacco products and 88 percent agree that the agency has a responsibility to address the widespread misperception that nicotine causes cancer.

Altria also released findings that show adults agree that policies banning tobacco products will lead to illicit markets for such products, endangering public health, youth and communities of color:

84 percent believe youth will have easy access to tobacco products in an illicit market;

84 percent believe bootleg tobacco products sold in an

illicit market are more dangerous for consumers than regulated products;

66 percent are concerned that an illicit market for tobacco products will lead to an increased burden on law enforcement; and

65 percent are concerned that an illicit market for tobacco products will result in an increase in policing in communities of color.

"Most Americans understand that prohibition-based policies don't work and that it's much better for public health to keep tobacco products legal and regulated," Magness continued.

"Harm reduction is the better path forward. With harm reduction, regulators provide adult smokers with information, choice and support to expand the off-ramp from smoking — while also continuing to drive down underage use." Regarding underage smoking, 66 percent of adults believe that preventing youth usage of tobacco



products should be addressed without banning or prohibiting tobacco products that are already legal for adult consumers, according to Altria.

Results of the survey also show that 79 percent of adults agree that if certain tobacco products have been scientifically shown to be less risky than cigarettes, physicians have a responsibility to communicate this information to their patients who are adult tobacco consumers and have not successfully quit smoking by using traditional cessation therapies. Of primary care physicians themselves, 89 percent support tobacco harm reduction as a public health concept and 85 percent believe it is important for the FDA to focus on making smoke-free tobacco products available to adult smokers to help them switch from cigarettes to less harmful alternatives.

https://www.csnews.com/altria-survey-majority-americans-support-tobacco-harm-reduction?fbclid=IwAR3H8e4rTSVX0JB2O4o5vAs8t589rS02FeU8US7q7u_eT-cyxGtKFYdxv4c

Is vaping safe or not? All you need to know about e-cigarettes

E-cigarettes are being promoted in England as part of the government's efforts to help people quit smoking tobacco at the same time as it cracks down on youth vaping. We take a look at why there are two very different campaigns on the devices.

What are e-cigarettes?

There are a variety of e-cigarettes, or vapes, on sale in the UK but they generally work in a similar way: heating a liquid to produce a vapour that can then be inhaled. The liquid usually contains nicotine and chemicals including propylene glycol, vegetable glycerine and flavourings.

The use of vapes is on the rise. The majority of adults in Great Britain who vape are current and former smokers. There are concerns, however, about children using them. According to a 2022 YouGov survey carried out for the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), almost 16% of 11 to 17-year-olds had tried vaping, compared with just over 11% in 2021 and almost 14% in 2020.

Are vapes safe?

That depends a bit on context. Vaping is regulated far more rigorously in the UK than in the US, where there have been concerns about lung disease and deaths associated with the liquids used in certain vapes. But that doesn't mean there isn't nuance.

The importance of e-cigarettes in helping tobacco smokers quit lies in their relative safety compared with traditional cigarettes. Tobacco smoking is the leading cause of preventable illness and death in England. Cigarette smoke kills about 65,000 people a year.

E-cigarettes often contain nicotine, but they do not produce tar or carbon monoxide, which can cause lung disease and cancer, as traditional cigarettes do. ASH also notes that vapes are a more effective quitting aid for tobacco smokers than nicotine patches or gum.

As a result, e-cigarettes play a key role in the government's efforts to reduce smoking rates in England to 5% or less by 2030. About 5.4 million people in England, or 13% of the population, currently smoke tobacco, according to recent figures.

But that doesn't mean that e-cigarettes are deemed suitable for all. Many, including ASH, say the devices are not recommended for children and non-smokers. That's because e-cigarettes are not completely risk-free. As the NHS notes: "The liquid and vapour contain some potentially harmful chemicals also found in cigarette smoke, but at a much lower level."

What has the government announced?

The UK government intends to boost the uptake of e-cigarettes among smokers while reducing it among children. One announcement is that about a million smokers in England are to be offered a free vaping starter pack in a "swap to stop" scheme. The government will provide funding and the scheme will be centrally organised, but local authorities will be able to tailor the initiative to their needs and control how they prioritise populations.

There are also concerns that young people and non-smokers

could become hooked on the devices through nicotine addiction.

The government has also announced it will offer vouchers and behavioural support by the end of next year to all pregnant women who smoke tobacco, in an initiative that is hoped will cut the risk of miscarriages and stillbirth and reduce the number of babies born with health problems. At the same time, it is also providing £3m to create a specialized "illicit vapes enforcement squad". The unit, led by Trading Standards, will be tasked with tackling the sale of banned vapes and underage sales.

What do experts make of the new plans?

On the whole, charities and scientists have backed the announcements, which appear to be based on some, but not all of the suggestions in the Khan review on making smoking obsolete, published last year.

Prof Peter Hajek, the director of the tobacco dependence research unit at Queen Mary University of London welcomed the rollout of the devices for helping people to quit.

"Vaping and other low-risk nicotine products have a potential to practically eradicate smoking-related death and disease," he said. "This new step is a sensible, pragmatic and science-based initiative and good news for public health." He also said that while young non-smokers experimented with vaping, very few progressed to daily use, and that vaping had much lower addictive potential than cigarettes.

Alan Boobis, emeritus professor of toxicology at Imperial College London, also stressed that e-cigarettes were appreciably safer than conventional cigarettes, but that measures were needed to prevent take-up by youth.

"The most recent studies support a role for vaping in helping smokers to quit and hence I think the government's initiative is a good idea as part of a broader range of measures to reduce the burden of ill health caused by smoking," he said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/apr/16/is-vaping-safe-or-not-all-you-need-to-know-about-e-cigarettes>

No to smoking

Tobacco use is a major public health issue in Pakistan, with an estimated 22 million adults using tobacco products, according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS). Recent estimates put the number of tobacco users at 31 million in the country. While traditional tobacco control measures such as taxation, regulation, and public health campaigns have had some success in reducing tobacco use, they have not been enough to eliminate it completely.

A recent report by the Royal College of Physicians in the UK found e-cigarettes to be 95 per cent less harmful than smoking. Pakistan should consider such harm reduction strategies as part of its overall approach to reducing tobacco use.

Sarnawaz Salamat, Islamabad

A letter published in The News on April 29, 2023.

Cigarette tax

A network of academics and researchers have recently indicated that Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of taxation on tobacco in the world, a fact that has major implications for revenue and public health. Comparing Pakistan to India, which has the same proportion of smokers as Pakistan, they note that the revenue generated in Pakistan from taxes levied on the tobacco industry is six times lower. Total annual revenue from taxation on cigarettes amounts to less than \$3.85bn — the amount spent by the government from the public exchequer on smoking-related diseases and deaths in 2019. It is unfortunate how little attention has been paid to tobacco taxation. Cigarette use is the main factor behind preventable deaths worldwide, and smoking is associated with multiple health problems. By imposing further taxes on tobacco products, Pakistan can discourage smokers and reduce the overall usage of tobacco products, thereby improving public health. Second, by not tightening its tobacco taxation policies, the government is losing out on an enormous revenue stream, proceeds from which can be

used to improve public services.

If thought out carefully, cigarette taxation can be an effective tool for policymakers to limit tobacco use, reduce harm and generate revenue for improving the delivery of various public goods. Unfortunately, this government's approach is confusing. Last year, the government ended up giving tax relief to tobacco companies after it raised taxes but also simultaneously increased the taxable price threshold for higher end cigarette brands. This year, it has managed to complicate matters further by enforcing a disproportionate increase in both the minimum sale price of cigarettes as well as federal excise duty rates. Tobacco companies warn that the measure will boost the already poorly controlled illicit cigarette trade. It would serve the government well to study effective tobacco taxation models and their outcomes in other countries, where both the public health threat and revenue challenge have been addressed with more success.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/17480997>

Smoking kills over 210,000 every year in Pakistan

Islamabad: A network of academic researchers, public health and development professionals, Capital Calling, states that reports have shown that at least 35 million adults walk into death trap of smoking and one-fifth of these are unable to quit this habit.

Smoking is a leading cause of death the world over, adding that it backs the government's decision to enforce taxes on tobacco. It states that the recent taxes enforced on smoking are actually too little too late. It adds that taxes put on cigarettes amount to much less than Rs615 billion, which was the amount the country had to bear in 2019 on smoking related diseases and deaths. India, for example, has a similar number of smokers in Pakistan but collects six times revenue to that of Pakistan. Pakistan remains one of the countries with the lowest tax rates on cigarettes.

The network says that Federal Excise Duty (FED) generates up to 80 per cent of the revenue from domestically-produced cigarettes in the country. Dr Hassan Shehzad, from IIU, says that for rich families, cigarettes are only a health hazard but for the poor it is an economic challenge as well as health, because the amount spent on tobacco can be used to buy food items. This directly leads to malnutrition for families living below the poverty line.

Expressing dissatisfaction on this state of affairs, he states that Pakistan is one of the worst-performing countries in the Tobacconomics Cigarette Tax Scorecard that evaluates the strength of tax systems despite the recent tax increase. Currently the FED on the lower tier is \$0.36 which is the lowest in the world. The tax on premium cigarettes is \$1.17, which again is the lowest in the world.



On a broader canvass, Capital Calling states that tobacco kills almost half of its regular consumers. Quitting smoking can save lives of up to 70 per cent of smokers. According to estimates, imposing Federal Excise Duty (FED) has made cigarettes harder to access and it could ultimately save 360,000 lives across Pakistan.

It is now near impossible for youth to buy costly cigarettes. Older estimates show that 1,500 children took to smoking on a daily basis in the country. After the increase in cigarette price, this number is expected to come down drastically. After the increase in FED, prices of cigarettes have gone up by 154 per cent.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1060793-smoking-kills-over-210-000-every-year-in-pakistan>

Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Foundation for A Smoke-Free World (FSFW), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

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