Protecting children from tobacco. What works?

Stronger packaging and labelling of tobacco products

Tobacco packaging is a marketing and advertising tool. Average smokers and the children around them are exposed to the pack’s promotional message over 5000 times per year. Packaging strategies and designs influence perceptions and purchase behaviour especially in young people.

Tobacco or make-up? Tobacco packaging promotes the product in the same way as other products such as make-up, sweets and perfume. The tobacco industry invests heavily in packaging innovation and design.

White less dangerous than red? Packaging defines the perception of what is inside. For example light colours are associated with a false sense of reduced harm by smokers and non-smokers alike.

Size matters. Large picture warnings covering more than 75% of the main sides of packs are significantly more effective than text-only and smaller warnings particularly among young people. In Canada, after the introduction of pictorial warnings in 2001 smoking rates amongst 15 to 19 year-olds fell from 25% to 12% by 2011.

How do plain packs work? Evidence shows that standardised packaging which removes all promotional elements on the pack (colours, logos etc.) undermines the impact of health warnings and reduces the attractiveness of the pack to young people.

Countries with the largest pictorial warnings:
85% Thailand; 82.5% Australia; 80% Uruguay, Sri Lanka; 75% Brunei, Canada. Pictorial warnings introduced in European Member States rank amongst the lowest in the world.

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Photo credits: Cancer Research UK, The Packaging of Tobacco Products

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Tobacco display at point of sale is tobacco promotion. Exposure to tobacco marketing at point of sale is associated with youth smoking uptake. Displays can also act as smoking cues amongst ex-smokers and those trying to quit.

Examples of countries with display bans in force
- Iceland (since 2001)
- Ireland (since 2009)
- Norway (since 2011)
- UK (since 2012)
- Finland (since 2012)
- Thirteen Canadian provinces and Territories (since March 2002 to January 2010)
- Five Australian states (since 2010)
- Thailand (since 2005)
- Panama (since 2010)
- New Zealand (since July 2012)

Challenges to display bans
The tobacco industry’s legal challenges against display bans have all been unsuccessful. In the most recent case, in 2012, the Norwegian government won the cases brought by Phillip Morris against its display ban in the EFTA Court as well as in its national court.

EU citizens support tobacco advertising and promotion bans at the point of sale
- 63% of EU citizens support a ban on advertising tobacco at point of sale
- 55% of EU citizens support a ban on displaying tobacco products at points of sale

Out of sight, out of mind. Young people remember tobacco displays. Point of sale display bans reduce young people’s access to tobacco products and their attachment to cigarette brands. The evaluation of point of sale display bans introduced in Ireland in 2009 found no negative effect on retailer viability.

Restrictions of point of sale displays
Combating the illicit trade of tobacco products

Illicit trade in tobacco products is a threat to public health. Illicit products are cheaper - therefore more affordable and attractive to young people. Combating illicit tobacco trade requires a mix of measures including security features on packs, stricter border control, specific government strategies, enforcement and penalties. Data from countries that have introduced pictorial warnings and point of sale display bans show that these measures were not correlated with an increase in illicit tobacco trade.

There are 4 different kinds of illicit trade of tobacco products: large scale organised smuggling organised by tobacco manufacturers themselves, small scale smuggling (bootlegging); illicit manufacturing (or counterfeiting); and the so-called cheap whites.

Photo credit: North of England Tackling Illicit Tobacco for Better Health.

Heard of cheap whites? These products are a recent trend in the illicit tobacco market. They are legally produced in third countries, with elaborate pack designs and duty paid stamps. Counterfeit cigarettes are not more 'dangerous'. Tobacco use is deadly no matter whether the product smoked is legally produced or not.

Photo credit: Fotoia.com

In counterfeiting one of the most common tricks is to copy the most elaborate pack designs and duty paid stamps. Counterfeit cigarettes are not more 'dangerous'. Tobacco use is deadly no matter whether the product smoked is legally produced or not.

Photo credit: Fotoia.com

Is counterfeiting easy? All tobacco packs are easily counterfeited. Within a few weeks, counterfeiters can copy the most elaborate pack designs and duty paid stamps. Counterfeit cigarettes are not more 'dangerous'. Tobacco use is deadly no matter whether the product smoked is legally produced or not.

Photo credit: Fotoia.com

EU citizens support the introduction of security features on tobacco packs

73% of EU citizens support improved security features on packs

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