

## Government surrenders to tobacco industry on standard packs: let Parliament decide!

12 July 2013

The Government's announcement that it will not introduce standardised packaging [1] for cigarettes and other tobacco products at the current time but keep the policy under review is a "tame surrender" to the tobacco industry, according to the Smokefree Action Coalition, an alliance of more than 150 organisations committed to promoting public health. [2]

If Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt is truly committed to public health then tackling smoking should be his top priority. The majority of the public support standardised packaging: a poll on the issue by YouGov, conducted for ASH in February 2013, found that overall 64% of adults in Great Britain were in favour of the proposal. [3]

The public health community is appalled that the government has bowed to the strong opposition to standard packs from the tobacco industry, which has run a well-funded and grossly misleading campaign in the UK and around the world. In the UK alone, just one of the big four tobacco multinationals, Japan Tobacco International, is spending £2 million in the campaign against standardised packs. [4] A series of advertisements from JTI opposing standardised packs breached the UK advertising code, according to the Advertising Standards Authority. [5]

There is no need for further delay. The evidence was clearly set out in the Department of Health's own consultation document. A systematic review of peer reviewed studies found that plain standard packaging is less attractive especially to young people, improves the effectiveness of health warnings, reduces mistaken beliefs that some brands are 'safer' than others and is therefore likely to reduce smoking uptake amongst children and young people. [6] The Smokefree Action Coalition warns that any further delay in introducing standardised packaging for cigarettes and other tobacco products will lead to more young people and children starting to smoke. More than 200,000 people under the age of 16 start to smoke every year. [7]

Since the close of the public consultation Australia has implemented standard packs and Ireland has pledged to do so next year. The Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments have all stated their support for the policy.

Dr Hilary Cass, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said:

"We are extremely disappointed that the Government has backed down from taking this essential step to protect children's health. Children and teenagers are most impressionable to branding and the attractive packaging used by the tobacco industry is no exception. It's therefore not surprising that two thirds of today's smoking population confirm they took-up the habit at a young age. Standardised packaging is urgently needed to cut smoking uptake and prevent smoking-related deaths."

Dr Hilary Emery, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau said:

"The introduction of standardised packaging for cigarettes and tobacco products would be an important step in cutting the number of children who start smoking every year. Children in poorer communities, and in vulnerable groups such as those in care, are particularly likely to become smokers. That government is stepping back from this change is a sad day for child protection and child health. We believe that Parliament should have the chance to vote on the issue as soon as possible".

Dr Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK's chief executive, said:

"The Government has stalled in the face of strong evidence and instead reacted to myths perpetuated by the tobacco industry, an industry well-known for suppressing the truth about its lethal products. The Government had a choice: protect children from an addiction that kills 100,000 people in the UK every year or protect tobacco industry profits. The Government has made the wrong choice, it is unacceptable to stand by and watch as these lives are lost. There is strong public support for standard packs; we urge the Government to let Parliament decide, without further delay."

Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health, said:

“There is good evidence of overwhelming public support for standardised tobacco packaging. And yet the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary have tamely surrendered to the tobacco industry on the issue. This policy is not some barnacle on the ship of state; it is badly needed to protect public health, and children’s health in particular. We believe that there is a clear majority in both Houses of Parliament for the policy. If the Government has lost its nerve, let Parliament decide on a free vote.”

## Notes

[1] Moodie, C, Stead, M, Bauld, L et al. Plain tobacco packaging: a systematic review, Public Health Research Consortium, University of Stirling, Institute of Education and UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies, 2012.

The Department of Health [consultation on standardised packaging](#) started on 16th April 2012 and finished on 10th August 2012. Standardised packaging was defined for the purposes of the consultation as:

- All internal and external packaging to be in a prescribed colour/s.
- All text on the pack, including brand names, to be in a standard colour and typeface.
- No branding, advertising or promotion to be permitted on the outside or inside of packs, or attached to the package, or on individual tobacco products themselves. For this purpose ‘branding’ includes logos, colours or other features associated with a tobacco brand.
- Any foils within a pack to be of a standard format and colour with no text permitted.
- Packs to be of a standard shape and opening
- Packs would still carry health warnings, fiscal marks and other markings to help identify fraud.

[2] The Smokefree Action Coalition is an alliance of over 150 organisations including the medical royal colleges, the BMA, children’s organisations like the National Children’s Bureau, the Faculty of Public Health, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Trading Standards Institute and major health charities such as Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation: all support standardised packaging.

[3] The first poll total sample size was 12171 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 1st and 19th February 2013. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The second poll was conducted on the 10th and 11th March 2013 showing the views of the public by which party they supported. The poll used a representative sample of 1684 adults. Respondents were shown what a standard pack could look like, including larger health warnings as in Australia.

[4] Tobacco Journal International. [JTI campaigns against UK plain packaging](#) 9th July 2012.

[5] Cancer Research UK press release: [Further adverts from Japan Tobacco International rules misleading](#), 17th April 2013

[6] Moodie, C, Stead, M, Bauld, L et al. [Plain tobacco packaging: a systematic review](#) (pdf). Public Health Research Consortium, University of Stirling, Institute of Education and UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies, 2012.

[7] Cancer Research UK. [Smoking and children](#). Accessed on 25 June 2013