

Britain considering plain cigarette packs

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Tobacco companies could be forced to sell cigarettes in plain grey or brown packaging in Britain in an attempt to deter youngsters from taking up smoking, the health secretary suggested Sunday.

Andrew Lansley is considering switching all brand packs to a standard colour in the belief that brightly coloured packages lure prospective smokers from a young age.

A spokeswoman from the Department of Health said colourful packs were widely accepted as the last form of marketing available for tobacco companies to recruit new smokers.

The current intention is to ask retailers to cover up their displays of [cigarettes](#) so that children are not attracted by the packaging, but ministers want to examine the use of plain packets as well.

Ministers want to see if changing cigarette packet appearance could deter children from taking up [smoking](#) and support people who are trying to quit, the spokeswoman said.

Plain packs would just show only basic information and health and picture warnings.

"We have to try new approaches and take decisions to benefit the population," Lansley said.

"That's why I want to look at the idea of plain packaging. The evidence

is clear that packaging helps to recruit smokers, so it makes sense to consider having less attractive packaging.

"The levels of [poor health](#) and deaths from smoking are still far too high, and the cost to the National Health Service (NHS) and the economy is vast. That money could be used to educate our children and treat cancer."

Campaigners Action on Smoking and Health called for Lansley to set a date for switching the packets.

"We're glad the secretary of state recognises the harm done by brightly coloured tobacco packaging in helping hook children and young people on tobacco," said chief executive Deborah Arnott.

"If he is serious about putting [tobacco](#) in plain, standardised packs then he should set a date now for when the law will come before parliament and when it will come into force."

The Department of Health said 337,000 people stopped smoking last year with the help of free support from the NHS and the number of [smokers](#) in Britain has fallen by a quarter in the past decade.

In 2007 more than 80,000 deaths and 1.4 million hospital admissions were attributed to smoking.

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