

People ignorant of cancers caused by smoking

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(Medical Xpress) -- Cancer Research UK today reveals the shocking level of ignorance about smoking and cancer among the UK public in a comprehensive new survey of more than 4000 people.

When asked to select cancers linked to smoking, more than 80 per cent of people did not know there was a link between smoking and eight different cancers.

At least two thirds of the 4,099 people surveyed knew smoking caused cancers of the lung, mouth (oral) and throat ([larynx](#) and oesophagus). But less than 20 per cent knew tobacco was linked to [leukaemia](#) and cancers of the [liver](#), [pancreas](#), bowel (colorectum), [kidney](#), [bladder](#), [cervix](#), and [ovary](#).

And less than 40 per cent knew that [stomach cancer](#) is linked to smoking.

[Cigarette smoke](#) contains a toxic cocktail of more than 70 cancer-causing chemicals. When a cigarette is smoked, these chemicals can enter the [bloodstream](#) and travel around the body, increasing the risk of cancer in more than a dozen different locations.

Professor Robert West, Cancer Research UK's quit smoking expert, said: "Nearly everyone knows that smoking causes lung cancer. And smokers may often gamble with their chance of developing the disease. The addiction can lead people to reason that they might avoid lung cancer. But the odds aren't good. And these alarming results show what could be a fatal level of ignorance about the toxic hit list from tobacco. There are only two options to eliminate illness caused by smoking: help smokers to quit and stop young people from starting to smoke."

The figures are released on the eve of England's five year anniversary of pubs, bars and all public spaces going smoke free – Sunday, 1st July. Seen as a success by the health community and enjoying massive public support, the UK government is now consulting on whether to remove the brightly coloured, slickly designed tobacco packaging.

Current packaging would be replaced with packs of standard size, shape and colouring, all designed to make cigarettes less appealing to children and give health warnings more impact.

Smoking is by far the most important preventable risk factor for cancer in the UK, responsible for nearly a fifth of all new cancer cases - around 60 000 – in the UK in 2010.

Smoking causes more than a quarter (28 per cent) of all deaths from cancer in the UK – around 43,000 deaths in 2009 – and has killed an estimated 6.5 million people in the UK over the last 50 years.

Jean King, Cancer Research UK's director of tobacco control, said: "The list of cancers linked to smoking is truly shocking. It's a long list of body parts that are affected, reflecting just how deadly tobacco is. One of the major problems with smoking is the strength of the addiction. Once a smoker is hooked it can be extremely difficult and take years to quit. The longer a person smokes, the greater the risk of illness."

Around half of all long-term smokers will die from cancer or other smoking-related illnesses. And a quarter of smokers die in middle age - between 35 and 69.

Around 20 per cent of the UK population smoke. Eight out of ten smokers start smoking by the time they turn 19 and around 157,000 11-15 year olds started smoking in the UK in 2010.

Jean King continued: "The key to reducing the number of lives blighted by tobacco is to prevent young people from starting smoking in the first place. Reducing the appeal of cigarettes is vital to this goal. Plain packaging of tobacco is the vital next step. Replacing the slickly designed, brightly coloured cigarette packaging with packs of standard size, shape and colour will give millions of children one less reason to

start smoking. With the government consulting on the future of tobacco packaging, we urge everyone to show their support for this measure and sign our petition at www.theanswerisplain.org.”

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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