

Plain packaging of cigarettes encourages young smokers to heed health warnings

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New research published online in the scientific journal *Addiction* shows that plain packaging (requiring cigarettes to be packaged in standard packages without attractive designs and imagery) may help to draw the attention of some adolescent smokers to the health warnings on the package. If so, this may in turn deter young smokers from continuing to smoke.

Researchers asked eighty-seven teenage secondary school (high school) students from the city of Bristol, UK, to look at twenty images of [cigarette packs](#) on a computer screen for ten seconds each while a device tracked their eye movements. Some packs were plain, carrying only the name of the brand in a plain font and a standard pictorial health warning. The rest were the conventional and colourful packs of ten popular [cigarette brands](#), which included the same [health warnings](#).

Students who had never smoked paid attention to the health warnings on both plain and branded [cigarette packets](#), while daily smokers tended to avoid looking at any health warnings at all. But students who were occasional (non-daily) smokers, or had tried smoking at least once, paid more attention to the health warnings on the plain packs than to those on the branded packs.

Compared with adults, adolescents are highly vulnerable to taking up smoking. Research has established that pictorial health warnings can discourage young smokers and that adolescents who forego a cigarette because of a health warning have a lower intention to smoke.

As a result of its plain-packaging legislation, the Australian government is facing an international trade dispute involving several [tobacco companies](#) and tobacco-producing nations. The results of this study will give the Australian government another piece of evidence in its favour, and something for other governments to consider as they contemplate plain-packaging legislation of their own.

More information: Maynard O., Munafò M., and Leonards, U. Visual attention to health warnings on plain tobacco packaging in adolescent smokers and non-smokers. *Addiction* 107, [doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2012.04028.x](#)

Provided by Wiley

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