

EU ministers back ban on menthol cigarettes

June 21 2013

European Union health ministers on Friday approved plans to ban menthol and other flavoured cigarettes as part of a crackdown on youth smoking.

But the ministers reduced the size of mandatory health warnings on packages, including pictures of diseased organs, and they stopped short of banning "slim" cigarettes.

The proposed legislation must now be voted on by the [European parliament](#). If they approve the law it could be in force across the 27-nation bloc within three years.

Irish Health Minister James Reilly, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, said it was a "a huge step forward in the fight against [tobacco use](#)".

"We cannot have a situation where we have a product that kills 700,000 Europeans every year looking to replace those customers with children, because that's where the advertising is focused," he said.

The health ministers backed the plans despite objections from some countries that they would have a negative [economic effect](#), an argument strongly backed by [tobacco companies](#).

EU Health Commissioner Tonio Borg, himself a former smoker, said he believed the ban could be in place within three years, providing that it is passed by European MPs.

The proposed legislation was released in December by the European Commission—the executive arm of the EU—and has since been under consideration by the bloc's ministers.

The health ministers meeting on Friday agreed a ban on [tobacco products](#) with a "characterising flavour" other than tobacco, for example fruit or menthol, which are particularly believed to target the young, according to a statement from the Irish presidency.

They also agreed to force tobacco companies to cover 65 percent of [cigarette packets](#) with written [health warnings](#) and gruesome pictures of diseased body parts.

But that figure is down from the 75 percent of packaging that was proposed in December.

One person involved in the negotiations however pointed out that it was an improvement from the current level of 40 percent.

Britain meanwhile secured the possibility for individual EU states to insist on plain packaging.

The ministers agreed on minimum packaging including a ban on "lipstick-style" packs popular with young people, it said.

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