

Stoptober 2012 encouraged an extra 350,000 attempts to quit smoking

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More than a third of a million people in England took part in Stoptober 2012, a national campaign to encourage people to give up smoking, according to new research by UCL researchers published today in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

Stoptober, which is now run by Public Health England, aims to support a positive social movement that encourages [smokers](#) to kick the [habit](#) by setting them a realistic and achievable goal (quitting for 28 days).

Using data from a very large national survey carried out with smokers and ex-smokers in England between 2007 and 2012, UCL researchers have been able to study the number of people attempting to quit [smoking](#) in Stoptober compared to other times of the year.

The researchers found that 50% more people tried to quit in Stoptober 2012 - this amounts to an additional estimated 350,000 smokers attempting to quit compared to other months in the same year. Stoptober was also found to be cost-effective. Based on the number of people who gave up during the month, it is estimated that about 10,400 years of life were saved at a cost of only £550 per year.

Dr Jamie Brown, Research Associate at UCL and lead author of the paper said: "Analysing the effect of real-world campaigns is always difficult but a long-running monthly survey – the Smoking Toolkit Study – provided us with an excellent opportunity to study the effects of

Stoptober. The data clearly show Stoptober resulted in a large increase in the number of people stopping smoking in England. The £5.8 million spent on the campaign by the Department of Health appears to have been an excellent investment."

The Stoptober initiative was designed by the Department of Health in collaboration with UCL Professor of Health Psychology Robert West and is based on psychological principles. It aims to build a positive social movement that motivates people to change their behaviours, using supportive social networks to do so. A key aspect of the campaign is setting and supporting the achievement of a realistic intermediary goal (stopping for 28 days), which will help people attain a longer-term, more difficult goal (stopping completely).

Kevin Fenton, National Director of Health and Wellbeing at Public Health England said: "We developed Stoptober as a new mass quitting event in the autumn and aimed to recreate the power of the January effect where people decide to make lifestyle changes. We are thrilled to have such powerful results for the campaign and so many people making an attempt to give up smoking. Stoptober is now an annual feature in the Smokefree programme and we will continue to build on its success and push the boundaries of what it can achieve."

Smoking is one of the leading risk factors for premature death and disability and is estimated to kill six million people worldwide each year. Previous anti-smoking campaigns have tended to focus on the harm caused by smoking. The Stoptober campaign was designed to build wide engagement with the event through associations with other positive, popular national events such as Movember. It was widely broadcast by traditional and new media including TV, radio, press, online adverts, PR messaging, Facebook and Twitter.

More information: Brown, J., Kotz, D., Michie, S., Stapleton, J.,

Walmsley, M. & West, R. (2013) How effective and cost-effective was the national mass media smoking cessation campaign 'Stoptober'? *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2014..

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