

Experts urge government to publish draft regulations on plain tobacco packaging

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Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body and causes many diseases. Credit: CDC/Debra Cartagena

More than 600 doctors, nurses and other NHS health professionals are today urging the UK Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Health to publish draft regulations on standardized, plain tobacco packaging.

The UK parliament has voted overwhelmingly to support the

introduction of [plain packaging](#) for cigarettes and other tobacco products - and the Public Health Minister announced that she hoped to publish draft regulations for consultation before the end of April.

But nearly two months have passed and this has still not happened, say the authors of an open letter published in *BMJ* today.

Smoking-related disease remains the number one cause of preventable deaths in the UK, killing more than 100,000 people every year, they write.

Most smokers start in childhood and exposure to [tobacco marketing](#) is known to increase this risk. Ending the marketing of cigarettes and [tobacco products](#) through their packaging is therefore "a necessary and logical step to protect public [health](#) and particularly the health of children at risk of becoming smokers," they say.

They point to an independent review that found good evidence to support plain packaging and also rejected misleading tobacco industry opposition.

The review also found no reason why plain packaging would increase the level of illicit trade in [tobacco](#) because key security features on existing packaging will be retained on standardised packs, including number codes and covert anti-counterfeit marks.

The Government has committed to a six week public consultation period after the draft regulations are published and it will also need to notify the European Union of the draft regulations - a process that can take up to six months, explain the authors.

"There is a relatively short time left for the Government to produce the draft regulations if they are to be voted on before the General Election,"

they warn. "We therefore ask you to confirm that they will be published in the next few weeks."

More information: Paper: www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.g3779

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