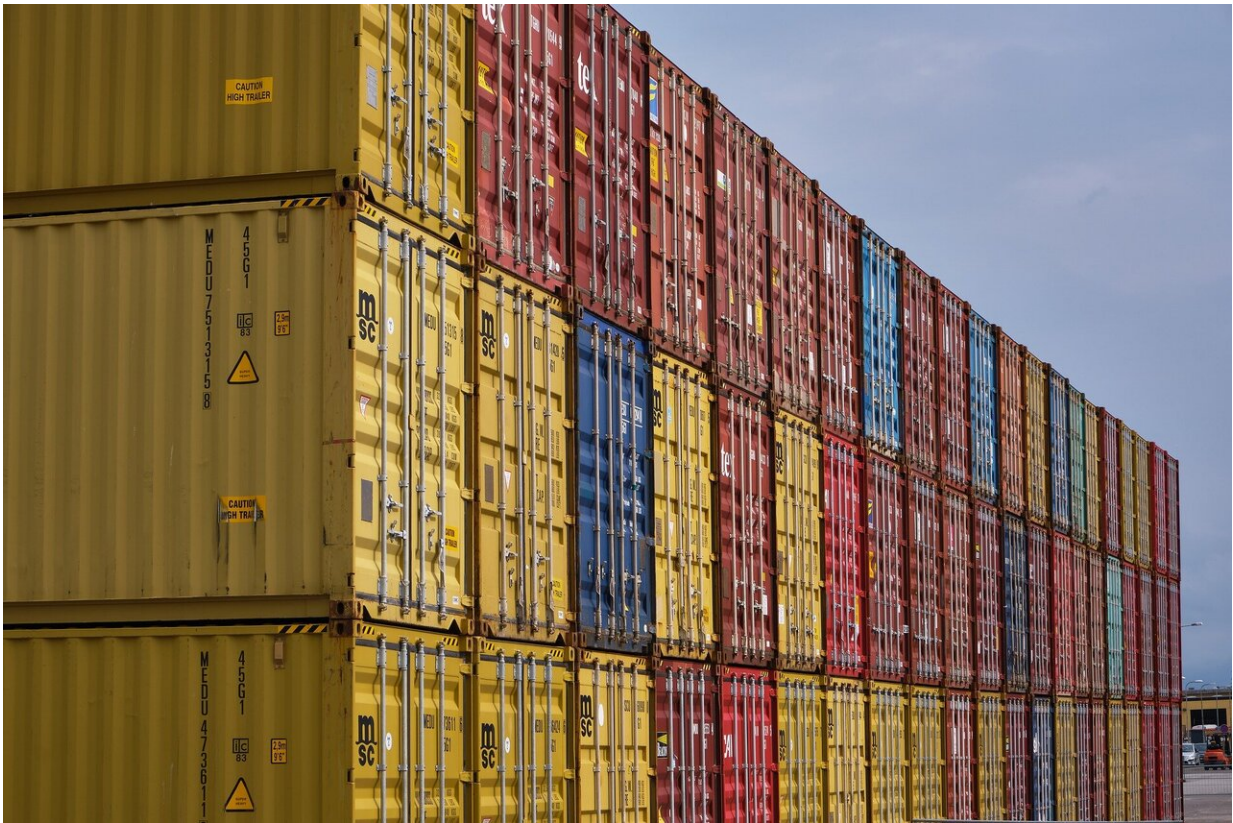


Free trade deal is a major threat to UK public health, warn experts

April 12 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The UK's decision to join one of the world's largest free trade agreements, known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), poses a major threat to UK

public health, warn experts in *The BMJ* today.

In acceding to the CPTPP, the government hopes to boost trade, improve [economic growth](#), and strengthen the UK's strategic position as a global rule setter. But Courtney McNamara and colleagues argue that free trade deals have serious and wide ranging implications for public health and policy making, as they commit countries to certain regulatory and legal obligations.

As such, they call on the government to commission a health impact assessment before signing takes place later in 2023 to evaluate the [potential benefits](#) and harms of this deal.

The CPTPP poses several threats to public health in the UK, they explain. For example, it is likely to make it more difficult to enact policies to cut consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and [unhealthy food](#) and drinks through clauses that allow foreign corporations to contest any such regulations.

It also contains provisions that effectively rule out a precautionary approach to [food safety](#), meaning that bans on products like those containing harmful pesticides can be challenged.

Additionally, while some workers might benefit from a boost in exports and demand, which might increase wages, the researchers argue that those working in industries that are undercut by cheaper imports and unable to compete are likely to experience economic insecurity and potentially job losses, which carry huge consequences for health.

The UK government has said the agreement will not mean lower health or food standards in the UK, and the authors acknowledge that the [gross domestic product](#) (GDP) boosting consequences of a free trade agreement could conceivably have positive health effects.

Based on the UK government's own calculations, however, they point out that the economic case for joining the CPTPP "amounts to no more than a 0.08% increase in the country's GDP over a 15-year period."

More problematically, the government's calculations fail to account for the implementation costs of joining the agreement, they add, "To our knowledge, no national evaluation has been done to account for implementation costs with respect to changes in regulatory and dispute settlement rules. If a priority of the government is to do no harm, a commitment made explicit during Brexit negotiations, then it should take account of the health implications of its trade policies," they write.

"Even if it is unlikely that given the government's poor track record on public health, the findings would influence its decision to sign, evidence produced by the assessment will still be extremely valuable by pointing to populations at risk and communities whose health might be safeguarded during the agreement's implementation," they add.

If the government fails to undertake a health impact assessment, it will fall to [public health](#) scholars, professionals, and advocates to mobilize and act to undertake this important work, the researchers conclude.

More information: The CPTPP trade deal is a major threat to public health and warrants a health impact assessment, *The BMJ* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj-2022-073302](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2022-073302)

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Free trade deal is a major threat to UK public health, warn experts (2023, April 12) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-04-free-major-threat-uk-health.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.