

Proposed smoking ban would improve UK public health—but tobacco industry opposition could be a major roadblock

November 13 2023, by Phil Chamberlain and Allen Gallagher



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

In his [speech on Tuesday](#), King Charles III outlined what measures the government plans to introduce to cut smoking rates and create a smoke-free generation in England.

Among the measures the government hopes to introduce as part of its new [tobacco](#) and vapes bill are plans to restrict sales of e-cigarettes so they're less accessible to children and [young people](#), as well as exploring the possibility of a new duty on vapes.

But perhaps the most notable of these measures are plans to introduce a so-called "generational" smoking ban. Current legal smokers would be unaffected but, if the legislation came into force as planned, it would mean that from 2027 anyone aged 14 or under will never be able to [legally buy a cigarette](#).

Prime minister Rishi Sunak claims that not only would eradicating smoking save [£17 billion](#) per year, it would also reduce pressure on the NHS. Over roughly the last decade, [25%-31% of all hospital admissions](#) were from conditions directly caused by smoking—such as respiratory and circulatory diseases, and cancers.

Smoking is also the [leading cause](#) of preventable death and illness in the UK—accounting for around [64,000 deaths](#) each year. Smoking even just [one cigarette a day](#), when compared to being a non-smoker, can increase the risk of suffering from heart disease by 48% in men and 57% in women. It can also increase the risk of stroke by 25% in men and 31% in women.

It's clear a smoking ban could have many potential economic and public health benefits. But whether such a ban actually comes to fruition is uncertain—and the [tobacco industry](#) will probably do as much as it can to ensure this [policy](#) never comes to pass.

Smoke-free generation

The proposed smoking ban is being introduced as part of the government's efforts to phase out smoking and make England [smoke-free by 2030](#). If this plan goes through, it would make England the second country in the world to introduce such a ban. [Sunak reportedly](#) wants to work with the UK's devolved governments to eventually introduce the ban across the rest of the country.

New Zealand was the [first country](#) to successfully implement a generational smoking ban in January 2023. This means that no one born after January 1, 2009 will ever be legally allowed to purchase cigarettes in New Zealand.

It's still too early to know exactly what benefits this policy will have on public health. But computer modeling suggests that a well-enforced effort would halve smoking rates [within 10-15 years](#) after the ban is implemented.

In the UK's case, the government claims this policy would be the "[most significant public health intervention](#) in a generation, saving tens of thousands of lives"—and that it has wide support from [public health voices](#).

But for years the tobacco industry has opposed virtually every [tobacco control policy](#) that has been proposed—including [smoke-free public places](#) and [standardized tobacco packaging](#). It should come as no surprise then that the industry could be a major roadblock in the government's plans to implement a [smoking ban](#).

Research by the [Tobacco Control Research Group](#) at the University of Bath, of which we're members, has [highlighted the techniques](#) the tobacco industry uses to undermine such policies. One main strategy

they have been accused of using is spreading a false narrative about the effect [tobacco control](#) policies will have on society and the economy.

This [narrative is spread](#) using a number of techniques—including producing skewed evidence, sometimes by third parties with undisclosed industry links, and bringing forward litigation. Tobacco industry actors have previously denied interfering in policy change.

Previous attempts to create tobacco-free generations have been blocked using such techniques.

For example, in 2019 the Philippine Tobacco Institute, which represents multiple [tobacco companies](#), [filed two court cases](#) challenging the city government of Balanga in the Philippines.

The city was hoping to introduce regulations which would prevent the legal sale of tobacco products to residents born on or after January 1, 2000. However, the court case went in the industry's favor—and so the regulation was never implemented.

In the US state of Massachusetts, the town of Brookline is also [facing a similar battle](#) in the state's Supreme Judicial Court.

The town was hoping to introduce the same policy measure, which would prevent legal sale of tobacco or cigarettes to anyone born after January 1, 2000. This lawsuit was brought to court by local shops whose businesses benefit from selling tobacco.

Litigation was not brought against New Zealand for its generational ban. Only time will tell if this will be the case for the UK, too.

Either way, industry arguments have already appeared in UK media following coverage of the government's plans. For example, [Forest](#)—a

smoker's rights group which [receives funding from tobacco companies](#)—has [been quoted](#) in one UK publication, referring to the proposal as "desperate" and stating that it "won't work". Their industry links weren't mentioned in the article.

It's crucial that any industry attempts to delay, weaken or scrap the policy are strongly resisted. One way to help achieve this is for the UK to adhere to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control—an [international treaty](#) signed by the UK which requires [health policy be protected](#) from the vested interest of the tobacco industry.

There's also a role to be played by the media to ensure transparency and full disclosure in their coverage of the policy so that when industry-affiliated voices comment, they are clearly identified as such.

Beyond pressure from industry, another potential roadblock for the policy is resourcing to enforce the policy. The policy also stands to be most successful when not viewed in isolation. Other stop [smoking](#) measures will continue to have a role to play, given that many current smokers will not be affected by the legislation.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Proposed smoking ban would improve UK public health—but tobacco industry opposition could be a major roadblock (2023, November 13) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-uk-healthbut-tobacco-industry-opposition.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.