

Study suggests novel ways to use e-cigarette packaging to better protect consumers

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Nine alternative on-pack messages. Credit: *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* (2024). DOI: 10.1093/ntr/ntae107

E-cigarette packaging could be used to encourage smokers to switch to vaping and deter non-smokers from taking up the habit, according to new research from the University of Stirling.

A study led by experts from the Institute of Social Marketing and Health, recruited 31 young people (11–17 years old) and 39 adults in England and Scotland to explore how warning messages on [e-cigarette](#) and refill packaging are perceived and whether alternative messages could help encourage smokers to switch to e-cigarettes.

The findings are [published](#) in the journal *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*.

While some participants thought the current nicotine addiction warning—required under U.K. regulations—helped increase awareness of nicotine addiction, the majority reported that it failed to capture attention and did not act as a deterrent to vaping. Participants suggested several ways that packaging could help to reduce the appeal of the products to young people and non-nicotine users.

Dr. Daniel Jones, from the research team at the University of Stirling, said, "Most studies on warnings on e-cigarette packs are U.S.-based or quantitative. Understanding of the potential impact of the nicotine warning required in the U.K. and alternative warning themes is relatively limited.

"Through the focus groups we found that although people generally felt warnings are important, the [warning](#) required on e-cigarette packaging about nicotine addictiveness was not considered useful. They were skeptical of this message, which was viewed as an afterthought or 'tick-box' activity to meet the legislative requirements.

"Some participants spontaneously suggested that, like traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes could have larger warnings, be sold in plain packaging, and have warnings not only on packaging, which is often discarded, but on devices themselves to increase exposure."

Alternative warnings

Researchers collected views on what type of alternative warnings people thought would be effective, and showed participants mocked-up e-cigarette packaging with alternative messages about harm, relative risk, toxicity, litter and wellness.

The relative risk messages, for example "Completely switching to e-cigarettes is a healthier alternative to smoking," were considered, at least by some smokers, as most likely to encourage smokers to switch to e-cigarettes. However, they were also thought to potentially encourage uptake among non-nicotine users.

Dr. Jones added, "We know packaging can play a crucial role in communicating product and [health messages](#) to consumers. More work is needed to better understand how [packaging](#) and labeling can help prevent uptake among [young people](#) and non-[nicotine](#) users while simultaneously reaching those who may benefit from using e-cigarettes to stop smoking."

More information: Daniel Jones et al, The Role of e-Cigarette Packaging as a Health Communications Tool: A Focus Group Study With Adolescents and Adults in England and Scotland, *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/ntr/ntae107](https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntae107)

Provided by University of Stirling

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