

Cigarettes to vanish from shelves in England

9 March 2011

Cigarettes will disappear under the tobacconist's counter from next year in England under new measures announced Wednesday.

Only temporary displays in "certain limited circumstances" will be allowed under the plans unveiled by the Department of Health.

The regulations will come into force for large stores in April next year and three years later for all other shops.

A consultation on whether [cigarettes](#) should be sold in plain packaging, in a bid to make them less appealing to young people, will be launched by the end of the year, the ministry added.

"Smoking is undeniably one of the biggest and most stubborn challenges in [public health](#)," said Health Secretary Andrew Lansley.

"Over eight million people in England still smoke, and it causes more than 80,000 deaths each year.

"We want to do everything we can to help people to choose to stop smoking and encourage young people not to start smoking in the first place," Lansley said.

Retailers reacted angrily to the announcement, saying there was "simply no evidence" that keeping tobacco out of sight in shops will discourage young people from smoking.

"We are disappointed that the government is pressing ahead with a [tobacco](#) display ban imposing £40 million (\$65 million, 46 million euros) of costs on small retailers," said James Lowman, chief executive of the Association of Convenience Stores.

But anti-smoking groups voiced their delight and urged the government to push ahead with the plain packaging proposals.

Blank packaging and a ban on public display have both been under discussion for several years.

England will join several countries, including Canada, Ireland and Finland, in removing cigarettes from tobacconists' shelves.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland individually set their own smoking laws.

But England would be the first country in Europe to insist on plain packaging if the proposal goes ahead. Australia is due to introduce the measure in 2012.

Just over a fifth of British adults are smokers, according to the Department of Health.

The government estimates that treating smoking-related illnesses cost the state-run National Health Service £2.7 billion in 2006-07.

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