

The growing evidence on standardised packaging of tobacco products

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The scientific journal *Addiction* has today published a collection of peer-reviewed research papers and commentaries that bring together key parts of the evidence base for standardised packaging of tobacco products from 2008 to 2015.

The English government recently announced that it will be putting regulations on standardised [packaging](#) to a vote before the general election in May 2015. If the vote is passed, England will be the second country in the world to mandate standardised packaging, following Australia's example, and there is a strong likelihood that the measure would also be introduced in the other jurisdictions of the United Kingdom.

This collection documents the growing evidence base on the likely effectiveness of standardised packaging in reducing smoking.

Key findings are:

- Plain packaging may reduce smoking rates in current smokers by reducing the extent to which the package acts as an unconscious trigger for smoking urges.
- Following Australia's 2012 policy of plain packaging and larger pictorial [health warnings](#) on cigarette and tobacco packs, smoking in outdoor areas of cafés, restaurants, and bars declined, and fewer people made their packs clearly visible on tables.
- Consumer research by the tobacco industry between 1973 and 2002 found that variations in packaging shape, size and opening method could influence brand appeal and risk perceptions and thereby increase cigarette sales.
- Removing brand imagery from cigarette packets seems to increase visual attention to health warnings in occasional and experimental adolescent smokers, but not among daily adolescent smokers.

- Standardised packaging could be more effective than larger health warnings in undermining the appeal of cigarette brands and reducing intention to buy cigarettes.

Professor Ann McNeill, who wrote an introduction to the collection, says "Arguably, for an addictive product that kills so many of its users, the [tobacco industry](#) should consider itself fortunate that, purely through historical precedent, it is allowed to sell its toxic products at all, let alone try to make them attractive through the packaging. However, it is evidence on the likely public health impact that is the primary basis for the policy on standardised packaging."

Professor Robert West, Editor-in-Chief of *Addiction*, says "Even if standardised packaging had no effect at all on current smokers and only stopped 1 in 20 young people from being lured into smoking it would save about 2,000 lives each year."

More information: The collection is available from the Wiley Online Library: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/%28ISSN%291360-0443/homepage/virtual_issues.htm

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