

13 July 2023**Update on the government plans to cut
smoking rates and tackle underage vaping.**

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Purpose of the report

1. In 2019 the Government set a bold ambition for England to be smokefree by 2030 i.e. reducing smoking rates to 5% or less.
2. One in seven adults (5.4m people) still smoke in England and tobacco remains the single biggest cause of preventable illness and death. Tackling smoking is one of the most evidence based and effective interventions that we can take to prevent ill health. It will help to deliver one of the Governments key priorities to cut NHS waiting lists. Reducing smoking rates not only improves health outcomes and reduces the burden on the NHS, but it also boosts productivity and economic growth.
3. On 11th April 2023, Neil O'Brien, the Public Health Minister, announced a fresh package of measures aimed at helping people give up smoking and stopping children from becoming hooked on addictive vaping products. A series of steps have been announced,
 - I. to stop children and non-smokers from starting vaping
 - II. to exploit the potential of vaping as a powerful tool to stop smoking
 - III. to help more people quit smoking, particularly where rates are highest

Step 1 Stopping the Growth of Vaping among Children

4. A specific call for evidence on youth vaping to identify opportunities to reduce the number of children accessing and using vape products was announced.
5. The consultation, from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities on youth vaping; ["Youth vaping – call for evidence"](#), closed on 6th June. Responses have been submitted from Public Health, North East Trading Standards Association and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute.
6. The Government will also explore issues such as,
 - Regulatory compliance looking at appearance and characteristics of vapes
 - Marketing and promotion

- Environmental impact of disposable vapes but exploit the huge potential of vaping to help adult smokers to quit.

Step 2 Illicit Products

7. Operation CeCe, a UK-wide intelligence hub between HMRC and National Trading Standards, has resulted in more than £7 million worth of illegal tobacco products being removed from sale in its first year and prevented far more illegal activity.
8. In recent times, North East Trading Standards carried out visits providing advice to local businesses and have seized over 1.4 tonnes of non-compliant vapes. Unfortunately non-complaint vapes continue to be found in 2023 and seizures continue.
9. HMRC and Border Force will be publishing an updated strategy to tackle illicit tobacco. It will lay out strategically how we continue to target, catch and punish those involved in the illicit tobacco market.

Step 3 Illicit Vapes and Underage Sales – a new vaping task force

10. The Government has announced £3 million of funds to be deployed for Trading Standards to tackle vaping issues now referred to as “Operation Joseph”. To date the Department of Health and Social Care have not signed off any detail.
11. This however will be a coordination function, delivered by National Trading Standards and likely to be on a similar model to “Operation CeCe”. However due to limitations on the funds, there may be less money for actual operational work.

Step 4 Swap to Stop

12. A ‘swap to stop’ partnership is a scheme where smokers are provided with a vape starter kit alongside behavioural support to help them completely stop smoking.
13. Following successful local pilots of ‘swap to stop’ schemes in many areas, there will be funding for a new national ‘swap to stop’ scheme - the first of its kind in the world.
14. Working with councils and others a million smokers across England will be offered a free vaping starter kit. The scheme will run initially over the next 2 years targeting the most at-risk communities first.
15. The first wave of Local Authorities to act as pathfinders to start a joined-up delivery of a ‘swap to stop’ scheme includes South Tyneside.

Step 5 Incentive to Quit

16. Over half of all smokers i.e. 3 million people want to quit smoking. Some of the most cost-effective stop smoking treatments we have are not currently available in England however working with suppliers will provide access to prescribers to put licenced medications in the hands of people who would benefit the most from them. For example ensuring the availability of proven smoking cessation medicines such as Varenicline and Cystine.

Step 6 Smoking in Pregnancy- a national incentive scheme

17. Nationally, 9% of women still smoke in pregnancy which affects as many as nearly 1 in 4 births in some areas and it increases the risk of stillbirth, miscarriage and sudden infant death.

18. All maternity services in England are establishing pathways to ensure rapid access to stop-smoking support for all pregnant women including the rollout out carbon monoxide testing widely to mothers.

19. A financial incentive scheme will be offered to all pregnant women who smoke to quit by the end of 2024. These evidence- based schemes have proven their value through pilots with a return on investment of £4 for every £1 invested.

Step 7 Smoking in Mental Health – Quitting

20. Poor mental health increases smoking. Smoking increases poor mental health. People with mental health issues are twice as likely to smoke but quitting smoking is as effective at reducing anxiety and depression as anti-depressants.

21. To ensure more people with a mental health condition receive the support they deserve, support will be provided to mental health services to improve the signposting to evidence based support for smokers.

22. At a minimum, all mental health practitioners will be able to provide signposting to specially developed, evidence based, digital quit resources.

Step 8 Tobacco Packaging – Mandatory Inserts

23. The front of cigarette packs has contained ‘smoking kills’ warnings since 1991. This will continue, but there will be a consultation this year on introducing mandatory cigarette pack inserts with positive messages and information to help people quit.

24. In Canada, health-promoting inserts are required by law and have been in place since 2000. Evidence from the experience in Canada shows pack inserts are an effective measure to increase the number of people attempting to quit smoking.
25. To that end the University of Stirling has been commissioned to undertake testing with UK adult smokers and young people to get this right.
26. And this is what is believed to be the crucial points to ensure that England will reach Smoke Free status by the year 2030.

Conclusion

27. Stopping smoking not only has major health benefits as well as economic benefits and the evidence to back this up is overwhelming.

And for these reasons, the Government are;

- Stopping the growth of vaping among children
- Introducing new help for a million smokers to quit
- Increasing enforcement of illicit sales
- Expanding access to new treatments.
- Backing joined-up, integrated approaches
- Rolling out a national incentive scheme to help pregnant women quit,
- Consulting on new pack inserts using modern technology

Recommendation

28. The Committee is asked to note the information.

Further information can be found at: [Minister Neil O'Brien speech on achieving a smokefree 2030: cutting smoking and stopping kids vaping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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