Smoking facts at a glance

ASH Fact Sheet | October 2026

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Worldwide

Tobacco kills up to two in three of its long-term users. Around 7 million deaths a year globally are due to tobacco.[1] Of those, around 5.8 million deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around 1.7 million are the result of non-smokers being exposed to secondhand smoke. Around 80% of the world's 1.3 billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries.[2]

Smoking in the UK

In the UK, in 2025, 9.8% of adults smoke; 11.3% of men and 8.2% of women.[3]

In 2025, adult smoking rates by each country in the UK were:

- England: 9.5%
- Wales: 11.1%
- Scotland: 11.4%
- Northern Ireland: 9.9%

Since 2011, the largest fall in smoking prevalence in the UK has been among 18- to 24-year-olds (25.7% in 2011 to 7.2% in 2025).[3] Those aged 18-24 and those aged 65+ are now the two least likely groups to smoke (both 7.2%). Although people aged 65 and over are more likely than younger people to have ever been smokers, they are also more likely to have stopped smoking. Those aged 45 to 54 years have the highest proportion of current smokers in 2025 (12.4%).

In the UK, one in six people in routine and manual occupations smoke (16.9%), compared with one in seventeen people in managerial and professional occupations (5.9%).[3] Someone who rents through an LA or HA is four times as likely to smoke as someone who owns their house outright. [3] Young people whose caregivers smoke are more than twice as likely to have tried cigarettes and four times as likely to regularly smoke.[4]

In England, one in four adults with a long-term mental health condition smoke (24.0%), while four in ten adults with serious mental illness smoke (40.5%).[5]

Smoking prevalence among young people has halved in the past ten years.[6] About 400,000 11- to 15-year-olds in England have tried smoking at some point, which is about one in ten (11%). About 100,000 smoke now. More than one in fifty 15-year-olds in England smoke more than once a week (2.2%).[7]

See also:
ASH Key Topic Smoking: what you need to know
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking statistics
ASH Tool Inequalities dashboard
ASH Key Topic Youth smoking
ASH Fact Sheet Young people and smoking

Secondhand smoke

Exposure to other people's smoke increases the risk of lung cancer in non-smokers by 20-30% and coronary heart disease by 25-35%.[8] It is especially harmful to babies and children.

In England, 4.2% of mothers smoked at the time of delivery in 2025-26.[9] This represents a strong decline in recent years, down from 5.6% in 2024/25, 7.4% in 2023/2024 and under half the rate from ten years ago in 2015/16 (10.6%).

See also:

ASH Key Topic Secondhand smoke
ASH Fact Sheet Secondhand smoke

Deaths attributed to smoking

Smoking is one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease in the UK. Data from the Global Burden Study of Disease 2023 reports that more than one in ten deaths in the United Kingdom were caused by tobacco (12%). One in five cancer deaths (19%) were due to tobacco.[1]

See also:
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking statistics

What is in cigarettes?

Tobacco smoke contains many chemicals that are harmful to both smokers and non-smokers. Breathing even a little tobacco smoke can be harmful.[10] Of the more than 7,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, at least 250 are known to be harmful, including hydrogen cyanide, carbon monoxide, and ammonia. At least 69 of these chemicals can cause cancer, including arsenic, benzene, and cadmium.[11]

See also:
ASH Fact Sheet What's in a cigarette?
ASH Key Topic Smoking: what you need to know

Health effects of smoking

- Tobacco kills **up to** 2 in 3 people **who use it long term**.[12] [13]
- On average, people **who smoke all their lives** will die 10 years younger than non-smokers.[14]
- It is estimated that for lifelong smokers, each cigarette will reduce their life expectancy by roughly 20 minutes.[15]
- Smoking can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body.[16] [17]
- About seven in ten lung cancer cases in the UK are caused by smoking.[18]
- Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body and affects a person's overall health and well as their life expectancy.[19]
- Tobacco is the only legal product that kills many of its users when used exactly as intended by manufacturers.
- Smoking ranks among the top causes of cardiovascular disease, including coronary heart disease, ischemic stroke, peripheral arterial disease, and abdominal aortic aneurysm.[20]

- Smoking is associated with an increased risk for a wide range of diseases including COPD, asthma, diabetes, MS, rheumatoid arthritis, mental health issues, and dementia.[21]
- Smoking is associated with an increased risk of early menopause in women.[22]
- Smoking in pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth and low birthweight. Maternal smoking after birth has been linked with a threefold increase in the risk of sudden infant death.[23] [24]
- Smoking is a major risk factor for impotence in men.[25]
- Smoking significantly increases the risk of impairment of olfactory function, negatively affecting smokers' sense of smell and taste.[26]
- Smoking is a risk factor for dental hygiene problems, including more serious conditions such as chronic periodontal disease.[27]

See also:
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking and cancer
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking, the heart and circulation
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking and respiratory disease
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking, pregnancy and fertility
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking and mental health
ASH Fact Sheet Smoking and other health conditions

Costs of smoking to society

Smoking costs England an estimated £44.8 billion per year, while revenue from cigarette and hand-rolled tobacco taxation (excluding VAT) only brings in about £7.5bn per year. [28]

See also:
ASH Key Topic The economic impact of smoking
ASH Tool Ready Reckoner

British tobacco companies

Two of the largest tobacco companies in the world are headquartered in the UK.

- British American Tobacco (BAT) is the UK's largest tobacco company, and it is headquartered in London. As of 2025, it is the second largest tobacco manufacturing company in the world based on net sales, after Philip Morris International.[29] The total revenue in 2025 was £25.6bn.[30]
- Imperial Brands, formerly Imperial Tobacco Group, is a British multinational tobacco company headquartered in Bristol, United Kingdom. It is the world's third-largest international cigarette company measured by net sales, after Philip Morris International and British American Tobacco. The total net revenue in 2025 was £8.3bn.[31]

Major UK Tobacco Control Milestones

1965: all **television adverts** for cigarettes banned

1986: adverts banned in **cinemas**

The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act (2002) was responsible for getting rid of the remaining forms of tobacco advertising:

- February 2003 – Ban on print media and billboard advertising
- May 2003 – Ban on tobacco direct marketing (promotions)
- July 2003 – Sponsorship of events within the UK
- December 2004 – Large adverts in shops, pubs and clubs banned
- 2005 – Sponsorship of global events, including Formula 1 and snooker tournaments

A **smoking ban, making it illegal to smoke in all enclosed workplaces** (including offices/shops/restaurants/bars) in England, came into force in July 2007. Similar bans had already been introduced by the rest of the United Kingdom: in Scotland in March 2006, Wales and Northern Ireland in April 2007.

The **legal age for purchasing tobacco** was raised from 16 to 18 in England, Scotland and Wales in October 2007. In Northern Ireland this came into force in September 2008.

Cigarette vending machines were banned in England in October 2011, in Scotland in April 2013, in Wales in February 2012 and in Northern Ireland in March 2012.

A **tobacco point of sale display ban** was introduced in large shops (>280 m2 floor area) in England in April 2012. This entered into force in Wales in December 2012, in Northern Ireland in October 2012 and in Scotland in April 2013. The sale display ban was extended to small retailers across all jurisdictions in April 2015.

A **smoking ban in cars** (with passengers under 18) came into force in England and Wales in October 2015. Scotland introduced the same law in December 2016, and Northern Ireland in February 2022.

Rules that **cigarettes and tobacco must be sold in plain green packets** came into force across the UK in May 2017.

Legislation to gradually **raise the age of sale for tobacco** is in effect from 1st January 2027. This will mean people born in or after 2009 can never be legally sold tobacco.

See also:
ASH Fact Sheet Key dates in tobacco legislation

Resources

Smoking data	Data Source	Source link
Smoking Prevalence	Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics	Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries
Cigarette smoking by gender and age	Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)	Adult smoking habits in Great Britain (Table 4)
Deaths attributable to smoking	Global Burden Study of Disease, United Kingdom	GBD Compare United Kingdom
Smoking-related hospital admissions	NHS Digital's Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) and is based on the primary diagnosis.	Statistics on Smoking Part 1: Smoking-related ill health and mortality
Smoking prevalence in priority populations	A collection of statistics about tobacco use and related harm for England and geographies within it	DHSC Fingertips – Public Health Profiles, 2026

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