Smoke-free Generation: Communications Toolkit

A once-in-a-generation opportunity

On 1 January 2027, we will take an extraordinary step towards a future where smoking is history.

The smoke-free generation will mean that children growing up today will never legally be sold tobacco. It is a landmark achievement, built on decades of campaigning, evidence and action. But passing the law was only the beginning.

Now we need to make it count.

The months ahead are an opportunity not simply to explain a new law, but to build a movement around it. We can celebrate the prospect of a generation protected from tobacco addiction, remind people why ending smoking still matters, and inspire more of the millions of people who smoke today to make their own journey towards a smokefree future.

That will take all of us. Local authorities, the NHS, Trading Standards, councillors, public health teams, charities, community organisations and many others all have a part to play. This toolkit has been developed to make that as easy as possible, with messages, materials and practical resources you can adapt and use in your own communities.

So please use it. Share the messages. Tell the stories. Engage your local media and partners. Promote the support available to quit. And above all, help us make the smoke-free generation something people understand, support and feel proud to be part of.

We have a remarkable opportunity to change the course of public health for generations to come. Together, we can make the smoke-free generation the beginning of the end of smoking for good.

Hazel Cheeseman
Chief Executive at Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)

On 1st January 2027 the UK will become only the second country in the world to introduce a 'smoke-free generation' by continuously raising the age of sale for tobacco.

This communications toolkit contains resources to help you maximise the opportunity that this presents for the benefit of public health and play your part to ensure it is a success.

Communications activity is focused around three key moments:

1. 100 days to go: 23rd September 2026
2. 30 days to go: 1st December 2026
3. Implementation Day: 1st January 2027

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will also be launching a focused communications campaign in November (see p.8). This toolkit has been designed to complement that campaign. The toolkit will be updated to include further assets as they become available and as we get closer to implementation day.

This communications toolkit has been produced by Action on Smoking and Health, Fresh and Balance and Humber and North Yorkshire Centre for Excellence. This toolkit has been designed for use from September 2026 to January 2027.

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Who is this toolkit for

This toolkit has been designed for anyone who has a role to play in implementing the smoke-free generation policy in England. This includes:

- Public health and communications teams in local authorities
- The NHS
- Regional tobacco control programmes
- Tobacco control leads
- Trading Standards teams

About this toolkit

From 1st January 2027, anyone born on or after 1st January 2009 will never legally be sold tobacco products and will be part of the UK's first smoke-free generation. This toolkit outlines how to communicate the implementation of the smoke-free generation, as part of the Tobacco and Vapes Act.

This will bring a huge opportunity to reduce the harm from smoking and ease the burden on our economy and the NHS. It is important that the public and key stakeholders receive clear communications to maximise the impact of the smoke-free generation.

The aim of this toolkit is to help guide partners through public and partner engagement and communications, and to help with conversations internally. The toolkit includes core messages that your organisation can use to communicate this policy, and all the materials and resources needed to do so. An updated toolkit will become available as we move closer to the implementation date, and as more resources become available from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), including details of their focused campaign.

Explaining the smoke-free generation

The Tobacco and Vapes Act received royal assent on 29th April 2026. The Tobacco and Vapes Act will create the UK's first smoke-free generation, meaning that from 1st January 2027, anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 cannot legally be sold tobacco products (this means any young person turning 18 next year).

The policy is quite complex, with the age of sale rising every day to prevent the uptake of smoking by future generations. Some 'plain English' ways of describing the policy are:

"Children of today, and the future, will never legally be sold tobacco"

"The age of sale will continuously rise to protect future generations from the harms of tobacco"

"Children born in or after 2009 will never be legally sold tobacco products"

We would urge partners to avoid referring to the policy as a "ban" as this has negative connotations and does not accurately reflect the policy, which does not prevent anyone who currently uses these products from being able to purchase them.

The policy makes it an offence to sell tobacco to people born on or after 1st January 2009. This means that the offence is committed by the retailer, not the young person trying to purchase tobacco. The policy does not criminalise the use and possession of tobacco.

What products are included in the smoke-free generation policy?

ALL tobacco products are included, as all are harmful to health. This includes:

- Cigarettes
- Hand-rolled tobacco
- Cigars
- Cigarillos
- Pipe tobacco
- Waterpipe tobacco products (for example, shisha)
- Chewing tobacco
- Heated tobacco
- Nasal tobacco (snuff)
- Herbal smoking products
- Cigarette papers

The smoke-free generation policy does not include:

- Nicotine products, including vaping products and nicotine pouches
- Non-nicotine vaping products

For more information about the Tobacco and Vapes Act, read a summary at Govt.uk: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tobacco-and-vapes-bill-becomes-law

For the full details of the Act, visit https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2026/18/contents

The importance of partner support and tailored local and regional communications

The law is changing on 1st January 2027, however, how well the law is implemented and the success of the policy hinge on regional and local efforts around awareness and implementation.

Partners can support this by raising awareness among key populations before the smoke-free generation policy comes into effect – using key dates and different communications channels to gain traction.

We encourage you to:

- Communicate with key audiences such as young people affected, families and parents using the messages in this toolkit (see below).
- Communicate with retailers around their responsibilities, sharing key resources such as guidelines from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS).
- Communicate with internal stakeholders and partners – from elected members to colleagues in the NHS around their role in supporting the law.
- Engage with people with lived experience around the Act.
- Communicate with people who smoke:
    - About the rationale for the law – that this is following the medical evidence built up over decades around the irrefutable harm of smoking
    - About the fact that it is never too late to quit and that free local, effective quitting support is available

Resources beyond this toolkit

The Association of Convenience Stores' Decline 09 campaign.

The Association of Convenience Stores' Decline 09 awareness campaign aims to help retailers prepare for the smoke-free generation policy.

The campaign has been backed by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and has been developed in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

The campaign includes a one-page guide on the actions retailers need to take to prepare, and in-store posters retailers can use to communicate the smoke-free generation policy when it comes into force. The campaign is available here

Public awareness campaign from the Department of Health

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will be launching a public awareness campaign in November. The campaign will aim to increase awareness among the public about the smoke-free generation policy.

When the campaign is launched, we will update this toolkit with a link to the resources.

Letter from Hazel Cheeseman to retailers

Chief Executive of ASH, Hazel Cheeseman, has jointly written to retailers alongside the Chief Executives of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, ASH Wales and ASH Northern Ireland. The letter notifies retailers about the upcoming regulatory changes on tobacco and vapes, including the smoke-free generation policy coming into force on 1st January 2027. The letter urges retailers to prepare, signposting them to Government guidance.

The letter is available here

The Toolkit

Key messages and how to use them

The smoke-free generation is a novel policy; the UK is only the second country in the world to pursue this course of action.The tone of communications should be excited, positive and hopeful.

There are three key messages that communications should convey, and this toolkit provides statistics, evidence and further arguments relating to each of these.

The smoke-free generation...

1.

Will protect future generations and our children from a lifetime of deadly tobacco addiction by gradually increasing the age of sale for tobacco from 1st January 2027.

2.

Will improve the nation's health, strengthen our economy and reduce pressure on the NHS.

3.

Has the potential to become a movement. Everyone has a part to play to maximise this opportunity and ensure smooth implementation.

Key message 1

The smoke-free generation will protect future generations and our children from a lifetime of deadly tobacco addiction by gradually increasing the age of sale for tobacco from 1st January 2027.

On 1st January the UK will become only the second country to create a smoke-free generation. The landmark policy was included in the Tobacco and Vapes Act, meaning anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 cannot ever legally be sold any tobacco product.

- **Tobacco kills**
- **No one wants their child to smoke**
- **The public support the policy**

The policy protects children, by preventing them from ever becoming addicted to tobacco, which is still the leading cause of preventable death in the UK.

How would I use this message?

This key message explains exactly what the policy does. It should be threaded through all comms with stakeholders, the public and the media to assist understanding. Focusing on children not only explains who is impacted by the policy but reflects a key part of why the public support it.

For example in social media posts on countdowns – "did you know the law is changing? From 1st Jan our children will be protected…"

Tobacco kills

- Smoking is uniquely harmful. No other consumer product kills up to two thirds of its users.[1] Tobacco is the biggest preventable cause of cancer, ill health, disability and death in the country, causing 64,000 deaths in England and around 408,000 hospital admissions a year.[2] The smoke-free generation will end the harm caused by tobacco for all future generations.
- Tobacco causes over a quarter (28%) of all cancer deaths in the UK.[3]
- Smoking causes at least 16 types of cancer,[4] and about seven in ten lung cancer cases in the UK are caused by smoking.[5]
- It is estimated that for lifelong smokers, each cigarette will reduce their life expectancy by roughly 20 minutes.[6]
- The smoke-free generation policy follows decades of evidence about the irrefutable harm of smoking. No other consumer product is as lethal or kills up to two-thirds of its long-term users.[7] By gradually increasing the age of sale for tobacco, we are gifting the younger generations a healthier future without the devastating effects of tobacco.
- Government modelling estimates that raising the age of sale each year will prevent up to 473,000 cases of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other lung diseases, leading to 155,000 fewer deaths by 2100.[8]

Key message 1

The smoke-free generation will protect future generations and our children from a lifetime of deadly tobacco addiction by gradually increasing the age of sale for tobacco from 1st January 2027.

No one wants their child to smoke

- Addiction to tobacco deprives people of a choice – two in three people who try one cigarette go on to become daily smokers.[9] The smoke-free generation policy gives young people the freedom to live without the harms of smoking.
- Smoking is an addiction started young, and is often intergenerational. Most people who smoke start young and regret ever starting. More than 78,000 children aged 11-15 start smoking in the UK every year,[10] and 62% of 11-17 year olds who have ever smoked wish they'd never started.[11] The smoke-free generation saves our children from living with this regret and gives them a happier and healthier future.

The public support this policy

- The public, including many people who smoke, back the smoke-free generation policy. It is supported by 65% of people in Great Britain, with just 14% opposed.[12] Among people who smoke, double the number support (52%) as oppose (24%).[13] No one wants their children to smoke.
- The policy has broad cross-party support with 75% of Labour voters, 70% of Conservative voters, 78% of Liberal Democrat voters, and 50% of Reform voters.
- The public supports strong action to end smoking. 67% of people in Great Britain want a country where no one smokes (only 14% oppose).[14] The smoke-free generation puts us on the path to achieve this goal.

How would I use this message?

Public support is a really key aspect to include when you are communicating with elected officials and their advisors.

ASH has polled public support broken down by political parties and also at constituency level if you would like to tailor your communications.

Access the ready reckoner here for public opinion data based on the 2024 election.

Key message 2

The smoke-free generation will improve the nation's health, strengthen our economy and reduce pressure on the NHS.

This policy doesn't just protect the health of future generations; it will end the burden that tobacco places on our economy, our NHS and individuals by creating a healthier population and saving lives.

How would I use this message?

There are misperceptions that smoking raises so much revenue for the Government that ending smoking is actually a 'bad economic deal'.This couldn't be further from the truth and statistics on the cost of smoking are great to use in all communications, especially media facing ones.

For example in a press release you could say 'not only will the policy save lives, it will save money as well' before citing the stats in this toolkit.

The cost of smoking

- Smoking costs public finances in England an estimated £16.9 billion per year. This is more than double the £7.5 billion raised through tobacco tax revenues.[15] The smoke-free generation policy will benefit the UK economy and put money back into vital public services.
- Smoking puts huge pressure on the NHS, and this law will reduce the death, disease and disability caused by smoking. Government modelling estimates that raising the age of sale each year will prevent up to 473,000 cases of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other lung diseases, leading to 155,000 fewer deaths by 2100.[16] The smoke-free generation will save the health and care system billions of pounds and ease the pressure on the NHS.
- Smoking also places a huge personal financial cost on individuals. Tobacco pushes 417,000 households below the poverty line, and people who smoke are almost three times more likely to use food banks than non-smokers (20% vs 7%).[17]

Key message 3

The smoke-free generation has the potential to become a movement. Everyone has a part to play to maximise this opportunity and ensure smooth implementation.

This key message should be used in communications to stakeholders who have a role to play in implementation or who work in tobacco control. This emphasises the vital role that they have to play to maximise the opportunity that this landmark legislation presents.

- **Turning legislation into a broader movement**
- **Smooth implementation through collaborative working is vital**

It is a chance to raise the profile of the harms of smoking (see key message 1), to promote local stop smoking services and accelerate progress towards a smoke-free future. Everyone at a local, regional and national level has a part to play to ensure it is a success, from retailers to Trading Standards, councillors and local authorities to public health professionals.

How would I use this message?

If you work to support smokers to quit then the smoke-free generation implementation period is the perfect opportunity to promote your services and raise awareness of the harms of smoking.

For example; you may want to link to stop smoking services at the end of press releases or work with local media outlets on case studies. See the timeline on p16 for other opportunities.

Turning legislation into a broader movement

- The smoke-free generation policy is part of a vision to end the harms from smoking in the UK for good and deliver the ambition of a smoke-free UK. Whilst the smoke-free generation is about protecting young people, there are still 5.3 million people in the UK who smoke (10.6% of the population).[18] It is never too late to quit smoking, and this new law is an opportunity for us to accelerate progress towards a smoke-free future.
- The smoke-free generation is an opportunity to raise further awareness about the enormous harm that smoking causes, and the support that is available for smokers. There is more support than ever before for adults to quit successfully with local support.
- In the UK, nearly one in five people in routine and manual occupations smoke (18.8%), compared with one in fifteen people in managerial and professional occupations (6.5%).[19]
- 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%).[20]
- 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.[21]
- Age should not be a barrier to being part of the smoke-free future. Whether you are 70 or 17, now is the time to quit.
- Partners should share local, compelling stories that can inspire people to quit, given the extra attention that will come with key dates (see the timeline on p16).

Key message 3

The smoke-free generation has the potential to become a movement. Everyone has a part to play to maximise this opportunity and ensure smooth implementation.

Smooth implementation through collaborative working is vital

- The smoke-free generation is workable and enforceable. It gradually increases the age of sale for tobacco over time, meaning adults who currently smoke are not affected and can still purchase cigarettes. Retailers are effective at enforcing age of sale policies, as they do with alcohol, and will be supported to understand and implement the new changes. It is important that they are recognised as a key partner.
- Previous increases in the age of sale have been implemented in the UK and globally without causing enforcement issues. The age of sale increase from 16 to 18 in 2007 in the UK led to a reduction in smoking rates amongst young people both in the short and long term.[22]
- To ensure smooth enforcement of the smoke-free generation, the Government is investing up to £10 million of new funding per year to Trading Standards from 2025/26 – 2028/29. The Tobacco and Vapes Act will also enable trading standards to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for breaches of age of sale.

How would I use this message?

If you are writing to retailers to inform them of the change it can help to use key message 3 to communicate the key role that they have to play.

You can also provide reassurance that you are doing your part to ensure that the public are informed of the changes so that retailers aren't the ones having to inform unaware customers.

Everyone has an important role to play.

Timeline for communications outputs

Date	Moment	Actions
23rd September	100 days to go	Adapt the 100 days to go press release (PR) included in this toolkit to your region and share with local media.* Share the 100 days to go social media templates included in this toolkit across your social media channels. **PR theme:** most people who smoke regret ever starting. The smoke-free generation protects children from ever having this regret. The public backs the smoke-free generation. No one wants their children to smoke and the public wants to see an end to smoking (key message 1).
1st October – 31st October	Stoptober	Share any local planned media outputs or content for Stoptober and link to the upcoming smoke-free generation where possible in these communications using key messages 1 and 2. Share and amplify resources from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) for Stoptober across social media and communications channels.
November	Department of Health will launch a national public awareness campaign.	Support and amplify the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) public awareness campaign's assets and resources across your channels
1st December	One month to go until implementation	Adapt the one month to go press release included in this toolkit to your region and share with local media. Share the one month to go social media templates included in this toolkit across your social media channels. **PR theme**: The smoke-free generation is the beginning of the end of the harm from smoking. The next generation will not have to face the devastation caused by tobacco (key message 2).
1st January	Implementation day	Adapt the implementation day press release included in this toolkit to your region and share with local media. Share the implementation day social media templates included in this toolkit across your social media channels. **PR theme**:The smoke-free generation has now taken effect and is protecting our children from the harms of tobacco. (key message 1)
January	Quit campaigns	Feed smoke-free generation comms messaging into your January quit campaigns, using the raised profile that the smoke-free generation has brought to communicate the harms of smoking and encourage current smokers to quit (key message 3).

* if your region has produced its own version of these materials, use those in preference to templates in this toolkit

Checklist for your area

Before 23rd September:

- [ ] Speak internally to your comms teams to make them aware of the upcoming smoke-free generation.
- [ ] Identify organisations who could amplify and extend the reach of your communications outputs on the smoke-free generation.
- [ ] Identify opportunities to communicate the smoke-free generation through your existing communications channels.
- [ ] Identify advocates who can champion the smoke-free generation locally.
- [ ] Identify opportunities to speak to local media about the smoke-free generation.
- [ ] Identify key audiences for your communications.
- [ ] Identify if there is an opportunity to promote local smoking cessation programmes throughout these communications.
- [ ] Identify any case studies with lived experience of smoking that your organisation is in contact with and consider if you can use their quotes and experience in any communications.

From 23rd September:

- [ ] Adapt the '100 days to go' press release to your region and share it with local media for 23rd September 2026.
- [ ] Share the '100 days to go' template social media posts across your channels on 23rd September. 2026
- [ ] Share your Stoptober content and link to the upcoming smoke-free generation where possible.
- [ ] Use and amplify the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) Stoptober content.
- [ ] When DHSC's public awareness campaign is launched, share and amplify this content across your channels.
- [ ] Use the social media templates in this toolkit to amplify the stories of local case studies on social media.
- [ ] Send out the template partner engagement email and the template email to stop smoking providers included in this toolkit to notify them about the smoke-free generation, and to encourage them to consider it in their communications.
- [ ] Adapt the 'one month to go' press release to your region and share it with local media for 1st December 2026.
- [ ] Share the 'one month to go' social media templates across your social media channels on 1st December 2026.
- [ ] Adapt the 'implementation day' press release to your region and share it with local media for 1st January 2027.
- [ ] Share the 'implementation day' social media templates across your social media channels on 1st January 2027.
- [ ] Consider weaving in the smoke-free generation messaging into your January quit campaigns.
- [ ] Use the guidance in this toolkit to produce video content for social media.

Template Resources

This section of the toolkit contains links to template resources that you can adapt for your local area.

Template press releases:

- To access a template press release for 23rd September (100 days to go until the smoke-free generation), please **CLICK HERE***.
- To access a template press release to be used FROM 23rd September (100 day countdown is on), please **CLICK HERE**.
- To access the regional data for the 100 days to go/countdown is on PR please **CLICK HERE**.
- To access a template press release to be used ON or FROM 1st December (one month to go), please **CLICK HERE**
- To access the regional data for the one month to go PR please **CLICK HERE**

This toolkit will be updated with a link to a press release for 1st January 2027 (implementation day for smoke-free generation) in due course.

Template engagement email to partners

- To access a template email to be sent to partners about how they can support in communicating the smoke-free generation policy, please follow this link: **CLICK HERE**

This template will be useful if you wish to engage partners with your communications on the smoke-free generation and you would like them to amplify your content through their organisational channels.

It will also be useful if you wish to explain to them why the smoke-free generation is important, to encourage them to produce their own communications content.

Template presentation for tobacco control leads

- If you are a tobacco control lead and will be presenting about communicating the smoke-free generation, you can find a template slideshow here: **CLICK HERE**

Template social media posts

Posting about the smoke-free generation on social media will be an important tool to engage as many people as possible and communicate our key messages. This will be particularly important around the key countdown dates of '100 days to go' and '1 month to go'.*

- To view template social media posts for X, BlueSky, Facebook and LinkedIn **CLICK HERE**.

This includes template posts around the 'key countdown dates', as well as templates that can be used anytime between now and 1st January 2027.

Template email to stop smoking providers

- To access a template email to be sent to local stop smoking providers, please follow this link: **CLICK HERE**

This template will be useful if you wish to notify stop smoking providers about the smoke-free generation and how the policy has the potential to become a movement, increasing quit attempts (key message 3).

Guide to filming your own video content for social media

Video content can be an effective way to engage audiences. Videos for social media can be short, and based around the key messages on the smoke-free generation in this toolkit.

- For a guide on filming your own video content for social media, **CLICK HERE**.

'I helped create a smokefree generation' sticker/badge design: access here

* if your region has produced its own version of these materials, use those in preference to templates in this toolkit

Frequently Asked Questions

This section provides the key messages in response to frequently asked and difficult to answer questions.

Please CLICK HERE for a guide on working with the media on public health issues and a media checklist.

Q: Why do we need a smoke-free generation?

A: Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and disease, responsible for 64,000 deaths in England a year.[23] No other consumer product kills up to two-thirds of its users.[24]

Smoking is also a major cause of health inequalities. Smoking prevalence is around 2.5 times as high in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived.[25]

By gradually increasing the age of sale for tobacco, we are stopping the start, and we will prevent the next generation from suffering the devastating harms from tobacco.

Q: If smoking rates are already falling, why is this legislation needed?

While smoking rates have fallen – from 20.2% in 2011 to 10.6% in 2024 – too many young people are starting to smoke.[26]

More than 78,000 children aged 11-15 start smoking in the UK every year.[27] The smoke-free generation forms part of the Government's smoke-free ambition, and progresses the UK towards becoming a smoke-free country. Gradually phasing out smoking stops the start and prevents young people from a lifetime of tobacco addiction.

Q: What impact will the smoke-free generation policy have?

A: Government modelling estimates that raising the age of sale each year will prevent up to 473,000 cases of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other lung diseases by 2100, leading to 155,000 fewer deaths.[28] This will save the health and care system billions of pounds.

The smoke-free generation is expected to protect around 4 million young people turning 18 from tobacco sales within the next five years, helping spare them from a lifetime of addiction to a product that kills around 64,000 people in England every year.[29] This could increase to 6 million in that time if people who currently smoke are also targeted with support to quit.

Q: How many young people currently smoke?

A: 3% of 11-15 year-olds currently smoke, but smoking rates increase with age.[30] Data from the Smoking Toolkit Study shows that 9.2% of 16–17-year-olds currently smoke, and 16.2% of 18-21 year olds currently smoke.[31]

Q: Will young people be criminalised for trying to buy or using tobacco?

A: The law will not criminalise the underage purchase, possession or use of tobacco. It is a law about the sale of tobacco by retailers so the legal responsibility is on retailers not to sell. This means that if tobacco is sold to someone born on or after 1st January 2009, it is the retailer breaking the law, not the customer.

Q: What about adults who currently smoke?

A: The law does not affect adults who currently smoke, who will still be able to purchase tobacco products. It only applies to those born on or after 1st January 2009.

However, it is never too late to quit and there is lots of support in place for current smokers if they wish to do so!

Q: Is this irrelevant to adults who smoke?

A: While not directly affecting the law around sales to existing adults, many families have seen loved ones suffer from smoking-related disease – and most people who smoke do not want their children to start.

The smoke-free generation is designed to protect future generations, but it does not change the fact that support is available now for anyone who wants to quit smoking. There are more effective ways to quit than ever before, including behavioural support, stop smoking medications and other evidence-based treatments delivered through local stop smoking services and NHS support.

Q: What about free choice?

A: Those who can currently legally be sold tobacco will still be able to. This is about raising the age of sale for tobacco gradually to prevent the next generation becoming hooked to a uniquely harmful and addictive product which kills two in three long-term users.[32]

Smoking is not a matter of free choice. Addiction deprives people of choice: two in three people who try one cigarette go on to become daily smokers, most of whom will regret ever starting.[33]

Over four in five smokers became addicted to smoking before they turned 20, most as children.[34] Once addicted, on average it takes 30 attempts to quit smoking, and only around one in ten smokers a year manage to quit.[35]

Q: What would you say to people who believe the Government should not intervene in lifestyle choices?

A: Public health has a long history of measures that protect health and prevent harm, from seat belts and drink-driving laws to restrictions on smoking in enclosed public places. The aim is not to interfere in people's lives but to reduce preventable illness and death. The smoke-free generation seeks to ensure that future generations are not exposed to an addiction that continues to harm so many people and communities.

Q: How will the smoke-free generation policy be enforced?

A: The Government is investing up to £10 million of new funding per year to Trading Standards from 2025/26 to 2028/29 to help enforce the law and tackle the sale of illicit tobacco. The Tobacco and Vapes Act will also enable trading standards to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for breaches of age of sale.

Previous increases in the age of sale have been implemented in the UK and globally without causing enforcement issues. Additionally, the indoor smoking ban in 2007 was criticised at the time over concerns that it would be difficult to enforce, however shortly after it came into force compliance was 98%.[36]

Q: What about the illicit market? Will it increase? Is it growing now?

A: The smoke-free generation will not prevent current adult smokers from purchasing tobacco and will have a gradual impact over time, so is unlikely to significantly impact the illicit market. The most effective way to reduce the demand for illicit tobacco is to reduce the demand for cigarettes, by stopping people from starting smoking, and supporting people who smoke to quit.

When the tobacco age of sale increased from 16 to 18 in 2007 it had no impact on black market sales – the number of illicit cigarettes consumed actually declined by 25% following the age of sale rise.[37]

The UK has a comprehensive anti-smuggling strategy led by HMRC, Border Force and trading standards which has reduced the illicit market share for cigarettes from 20% in 2000/01 to 12% in 2024/25.[38] The number of illegal cigarettes on sale in the UK has fallen by almost 90% since 2000. The introduction of policies such as smoke-free laws in 2007 and plain cigarette packs in 2015 did not lead to an increase in illicit sales.

Q: What will happen when someone aged 40 can be sold tobacco, and someone aged 39 can't?

A: Adults impacted by this measure will never have been able to purchase tobacco legally and as a result, will be much less likely to be long-term smokers.

Government modelling shows that raising the age of sale could virtually eliminate smoking in under 30s by 2050.[39] This means that there will be very few people impacted by this measure who are still smoking in their 30s and 40s.

Alongside this law, the Government has provided funding to stop smoking services, which are now ringfenced in the Public Health Grant, protecting at least £153 million per year for these services to support people who smoke to quit.

Q: How much money will the smoke-free generation policy save?

A: Government modelling shows that the smoke-free generation policy could save £65.3 billion by 2100 through savings in healthcare, productivity, social care and the costs of fires.[40] Stopping the start and eliminating smoking over time will save billions in health and social care costs.

Q: Does the smoke-free generation include vaping and nicotine products?

A: No, the smoke-free generation policy applies to all tobacco products, and does not include vaping and nicotine products.

The Tobacco and Vapes Act introduces separate restrictions on vaping and nicotine products to protect children. From 1st June 2027 the advertisement and sponsorship of vaping and nicotine products will be banned. The Government is also currently consulting on restrictions on the packaging, appearance and display of these products.

The smoke-free generation policy only applies to tobacco products because tobacco is uniquely addictive and is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the UK. Whilst vaping is not risk free, it is much less harmful than smoking and it is important that vaping products remain available as a smoking cessation product for adults who want to quit smoking.

Q: Do the public support the smoke-free generation?

A: The public backs the smoke-free generation policy. Public support figures from ASH, based on YouGov survey data, shows that 65% of the public support the policy, with only 14% opposed.[41] No one wants their children to smoke, and the public back strong action on tackling smoking.

The policy has broad cross-party support with 75% of Labour voters, 70% of Conservative voters, 78% of Liberal Democrat voters, and 50% of Reform voters. A majority (52%) of people who smoke also support raising the age of sale, more than double the proportion (24%) opposed.[42]

Most parents, including most who smoke, don't want their children to become addicted to smoking. The main group opposed to this are the tobacco industry and their allies.

Q: How will this impact small retailers?

A: Research commissioned by ASH finds that most retailers support the smoke-free generation. More than half (51%) of 900 small tobacco retailers in England and Wales who were spoken to on the phone by independent researchers supported the smoke-free generation, nearly double those opposed (26%).[43]

Q: Where can retailers find out more information?

A: The Association of Convenience Stores has launched a new awareness campaign to help retailers, colleagues and consumers with the incoming rules on age verification for tobacco products.

The Decline 09 campaign, backed by the Chartered Institute for Trading Standards, has been developed in consultation with the Department for Health and Social Care. Retailers can view the campaign here.

Q: When will the Department of Health's campaign go live?

A: The Department of Health will run a public awareness campaign starting in November. This toolkit will be updated with a link to the resources as soon as they are available.

Q: If someone is old enough to vote, join the army and pay taxes, why can't they buy cigarettes?

A: Tobacco is unlike any other consumer product because it is highly addictive when used exactly as intended, causing serious disease and killing two in three lifelong smokers early.[44] The policy reflects decades of evidence about the harms of smoking and focuses on preventing addiction before it starts. This law has been the result of a cross-party approach introduced by the last Government and continued by the current Government to justify a new approach to tobacco.

"Addiction to smoking traps then slowly disables and kills thousands of our fellow citizens, especially the most vulnerable. The great majority of smokers wish they had never started, but their choice was taken away at a young age by marketing that deliberately promoted addiction to nicotine." CMO Chris Whitty. [45]

Q: Why not just educate young people rather than change the law?

A: Education through public health campaigns at population level is important - but has not eliminated smoking. Evidence shows that smoking uptake is strongly influenced by the availability, affordability and marketing of tobacco products. The most successful tobacco control approaches combine awareness with legislation, stop smoking support, taxation and enforcement. The smoke-free generation is part of that wider approach.

Q: Is this not discriminatory because people born in different years will be treated differently?

A: The policy applies consistently to everyone born on or after 1 January 2009. Similar age-based laws already exist for products and activities that pose health or safety risks. The intention is not to discriminate but to protect future generations from a product that causes substantial harm and addiction.

This is no different to the laws which apply to any other age-restricted product.

Q: Why is tobacco being singled out when alcohol and unhealthy food also cause harm?

A: Tobacco is unique in that it kills up to two in three long-term users when used exactly as intended. Significant health risks start from one cigarette a day and it remains one of the biggest causes of preventable illness and death.

The smoke-free generation is not a slippery slope to begin banning lots of other things - the Government's approach reflects the exceptional harm caused by smoking and its impact on individuals, families and public services.

Q: If smoking is so dangerous, why isn't tobacco simply banned?

A: It's a good question, since the evidence around tobacco has built for decades from the 1950s onwards when tobacco smoking was proven as a direct and common cause of lung cancer. It is possible that if the cigarette was invented as a product today, it would not legally be allowed to be sold.

Evidence has also been firmly established around a range of other life-limiting and serious causes of death, disease and disability from middle age onwards – COPD, heart disease and stroke, dementia and 16 types of cancer.

Governments have historically taken a different approach to tobacco. Rather than prohibiting tobacco for existing smokers, the smoke-free generation prevents future generations from becoming addicted while allowing current adult smokers to continue purchasing tobacco legally.

The policy recognises that many people who smoke are already addicted to nicotine and need support to quit. That's why measures to prevent uptake sit alongside investment in stop smoking services and quit support. The aim is to stop the next generation becoming addicted, rather than punish those who already are.

Q: Isn't this treating adults like children?

A: No. The policy is not based on age alone but on preventing addiction to a product that causes extraordinary harm. Tobacco is unique in that it kills up to two in three long-term users when used as intended.

Most people who smoke start young and many later regret ever starting. The policy is designed to stop future generations becoming addicted in the first place, rather than restricting the rights of people who can already legally buy tobacco.

Q: Won't people just get someone older to buy cigarettes for them?

A: Some people may try to get around the law, just as some people attempt to circumvent existing age of sale laws. However, that has never been a reason not to have protections in place.

The law also includes offences relating to proxy purchasing, and experience from other public health measures shows that reducing availability and normalisation can have a significant impact over time. The goal is to make smoking less accessible.

Q: Is the smoke-free generation compatible with EU law?

A: Yes. The UK Government has stated that the smoke-free generation as part of the Tobacco and Vapes Act is compatible with EU law and will apply across the UK, including Northern Ireland. This is supported by independent legal analysis commissioned by ASH.

A legal opinion commissioned by the Tobacco Manufacturers Association (the trade association for tobacco companies) claimed that the legislation would breach the Windsor Framework – the post-Brexit legal agreement between the UK and the EU that governs the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Bill was notified to the EU Technical Regulation Information System (TRIS) which allows member states to object if they feel that legislation creates barriers in the internal market. The UK Government has clarified that TRIS is a notification system, "not an approval process" and reiterated their position that the Act will apply across the UK.

A handful of Member States – Greece, Slovakia, Romania, Czechia, Italy, and Portugal – raised objections about the compatibility of the generational tobacco sales ban with EU law. The UK Government responded to the concerns raised, setting out why the Bill is compatible with EU law and why it is justified on public health grounds.

This echoes the conclusions of a legal opinion commissioned by ASH. The Act has also been approved by the Northern Ireland Assembly, along with the other UK nations.

Tobacco companies have a long history of using legal challenges to delay and block tobacco control policies – it is not surprising that they are questioning the legal compatibility of the Act.

The industry has stepped up its lobbying of EU policymakers and some EU member states have been accused of using their political influence to defend the interests of the industry.

Both Greece and Romania have opposed the EU Commission's attempts to strengthen the Tobacco Products Directive.

For more information, see the ASH blog: Does the smoke-free Generation Really Break EU Law? Industry vs Evidence

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