

British Heart Foundation Briefing:

Tobacco and Vapes Bill: House of Lords Second Reading

Key speaking points

Smoking continues to be one of the leading preventable causes of illness and death in the UK, and is a key driver of health inequalities

- **There are at least 15,000 deaths from heart and circulatory diseases attributable to smoking in the UK every year.**
- Currently, smoking costs society in England an estimated £43.7 billion a year. Achieving a smokefree country could result in as many as 135,000 additional full-time equivalent jobs each year, worth almost £10 billion to the economy.
- Over two-thirds (69%) of adults aged 18+ across Great Britain support the proposed measure to raise the age of sale of tobacco products.
- The Bill comes to the Lords after receiving strong cross-party support in favour in the Commons at third reading (366 ayes to 41 noes).
- **British Heart Foundation (BHF) strongly supports the landmark Tobacco and Vapes Bill, and we urge all Peers to support it as it continues its journey through Parliament.**

It is crucial that the tobacco industry is prevented from weakening the Bill

- When the Bill was tabled by the previous Government, we saw typical tobacco industry tactics used to try to limit its reach. We cannot let the tobacco industry weaken the Bill to protect their commercial interests – allowing them to do so would miss a critical, once-in-a-generation opportunity to save hundreds of thousands of lives.
- We believe the powers in the Bill are necessary and proportionate to future-proof the legislation and provide flexibility against future industry innovation, to prevent the tobacco industry exploiting loopholes and circumventing regulations, as has been done in the past.

A joined-up approach is required to achieve a smokefree future, including supporting smoking cessation

- The Tobacco and Vapes Bill is the most significant smoking legislation in a decade, but it should be supported by a comprehensive strategy that includes further action to reduce take up and support those looking to quit smoking.
- This should include adequate and sustained funding for local stop smoking services, smoking cessation mass media campaigns, and enforcement of underage and illicit trade.
- It should also include developing a Smokefree fund based on a polluter-pays principle, which could generate up to £700 million in the first year to fund smoking cessation measures.

The impact of smoking in the UK and on cardiovascular health

Tobacco is a uniquely lethal product which kills up to half of users prematurely when used as intended. Smoking is one of the leading risk factors for heart and circulatory diseases and is estimated to account for at least 15,000 heart and circulatory deaths in the UK every year. Smoking affects heart and circulatory health by making the walls of arteries sticky, increasing the likelihood of blood clots and raising heart rate and blood pressure, a risk factor for heart attack and stroke.

Smoking is also a key driver of health inequalities, with the health burden not spread equally across the society. **In 2023, smoking prevalence in Blackpool, an area of relatively high deprivation, was 21%, compared to just 6% in St Albans,** an area of relatively low deprivation. In 2021, around 33% of all smoking adults in England lived in the two most deprived deciles, up from 30% in 2017. Action to secure a smokefree future must take this into account and be targeted to address these long-standing health inequalities to ensure more people live well for longer, alleviating pressure on our health services. New research has found that between 2006 and 2024, smoking rates declined the most in the Northern regions of England, where prevalence has historically been higher than the national average, demonstrating the positive impact that targeted action on tobacco control can have.

As well as having a devastating effect on individuals' quality of life and risk of mortality, smoking is associated with a significant economic impact. **Estimates place the full cost of smoking to society in England at £43.7 billion a year.** This

figure includes NHS and social care costs, from lost productivity costs, as smokers are more likely to take sick leave from work than non-smokers, and smoking increases the risk of disability and premature death, as well as wider costs to the economy. Thus, the £6.8bn raised in England from tobacco taxation each year does not come close to covering the full cost of smoking to society.

Achieving a smokefree country could result in as many as 135,000 additional full-time equivalent jobs each year, worth almost £10 billion to the economy, through ex-smokers redirecting their spending to goods and services with greater value to the UK economy. Reducing the risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD) by addressing risk factors like smoking is crucial to alleviating further strain on the already overstretched NHS and driving growth.

Increasing the age of sale of tobacco products

Smoking is an addiction of childhood, with over 80% of adult smokers reporting starting before the age of 20. Every day in the UK around 350 young adults aged 18-25 start smoking regularly, risking being trapped into a lifetime of addiction and premature death. Whether they are adults or children when they start, addiction deprives people of choice. Three-quarters of smokers would never have started if they had the choice again.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will not criminalise smoking, but will ban the sale of tobacco to those of the relevant age. The phased approach means those who can legally buy cigarettes now will not be prevented from doing so in the future, whilst protecting future generations across the UK from the devastating impact of smoking. Analysis from 2007 which looked at the impact of raising the age of sale from 16 to 18 shows a sustained reduction in smoking rates across age groups impacted by the change in England.

This Bill is a landmark piece of legislation that could transform smoking rates in the UK, ensuring a reduction in the number of people who become addicted to smoking in the first place. Indeed, **Government modelling estimates that raising the age of sale will avoid up to 472,950 cases of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other lung diseases by 2100, avoiding tens of thousands of deaths from these diseases, and saving the health and care system billions of pounds.**

BHF is urging all Peers to support the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, through speaking in favour of the legislation as it passes through the Lords and raising awareness of the critical need to support a reduction in smoking to prevent tobacco-related CVD cases.

Reducing the risk of secondhand smoke exposure

BHF research has long shown how damaging secondhand smoke is to cardiovascular health. In the early 2000s, BHF-funded research revealed the damage caused by exposure to tobacco smoke in public places, showing that passive smoking could increase men's risk of coronary heart disease by as much as if they were smoking up to nine cigarettes a day. However, these health risks are still an issue; in 2021, an equivalent of 3,000 deaths in the UK could be attributed to secondhand smoke exposure.

It is welcome to see the Bill expand smokefree places to outside schools, playgrounds and hospitals, to protect the health of children, non-smokers and vulnerable groups.

Restrictions on e-cigarette marketing

The proportion of young people, under the age of 18, who have ever vaped has significantly increased over the last five years, with vapes intentionally marketed using bright colours and sweet, fruity flavours particularly appealing to children. As we do not fully know yet what the long-term health impacts of vaping may be, action needs to be taken to address this trend and prevent more young people and non-smokers from accessing e-cigarettes for recreational purposes. Given the evidence that shows that vaping can be less harmful than smoking in the short term, BHF supports the Government's ambition to introduce new restrictions to curb the rise in youth vaping, whilst ensuring these products remain appropriately available for adult smokers trying to quit.

Going further - achieving a smokefree future

While the Tobacco and Vapes Bill has huge potential to reduce the number of people who start smoking to begin with, it is estimated that 13% of adults in the UK currently smoke – that is around 7 million adults.

To achieve a smokefree future, Government should implement a comprehensive package of measures alongside the Bill, to complement and help secure its aims, and helping to support current smokers to quit. This should include adequate and sustained funding for local stop smoking services, smoking cessation mass media campaigns, and enforcement of underage and illicit trade, with a Smokefree Fund to support these vital tobacco control measures. A polluter pays levy, which follows the principle that highly profitable tobacco manufacturers should bear responsibility for the cost of tobacco control and smoking cessation support, **could raise up to £700 million a year** for this fund to help ensure the Government's Smokefree UK target is achieved. 79% of adults in Great Britain support this, to fund measures to help smokers quit and prevent young people from taking up smoking.