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Letters Public health advances

Concerns about tobacco control

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In discussing whether the UK is turning the clock back on public health advances,¹ the fact that the coalition government is considering mandatory plain brown packets for cigarettes is encouraging.² However, this move, which may get held up in the courts, must not delay implementing the proposals to ban tobacco vending machines and point of sale displays that accompanied the 2009 Health Act.

One in two smokers dies from their habit, and 59% of the difference in premature male mortality between rich and poor people in England and Wales can be explained by differential rates of smoking.³ Bans on tobacco advertising reduce cigarette consumption, with the caveat that bans need to be comprehensive to be effective.⁴

Ever larger back lit point of sale displays have been used by the tobacco industry in recent years to circumvent the advertising ban.⁵ Poorly supervised vending machines, while comprising a tiny proportion of total cigarette sales, are the means by which one in eight child smokers accesses their cigarettes.⁶

Whereas the coalition government has confirmed that the ban on tobacco vending machines will go ahead, we remain concerned that it has failed to reassure parliament that it will implement the ban on point of sale displays in full.

Notes

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Footnotes

- Competing interests: Tobacco and tobacco control policies have an impact on all of the authors in both their professional and personal lives.

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