

LETTERS

CIGARETTE PACKAGING

Children must be protected from the tobacco industry's marketing tactics

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Every day in the UK, hundreds of children aged 11-15 years start smoking for the first time,^{1 2} and there is compelling evidence that children's perceptions of cigarettes are influenced by branding.^{3 4} As health professionals working to prevent and treat lung disease caused by smoking, we welcome the government's decision to enable legislation for standardised packaging of cigarettes in an amendment to the Children and Families Bill.

Industry documents make it clear that after the prohibition of tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship cigarette packaging became the tobacco industry's key marketing tool to attract and retain customers. Current tobacco packaging makes cigarettes and smoking appear appealing and distracts attention from health warnings. Packaging also misleads consumers about the harmfulness of products. Although terms like "light" and "mild" have been banned, smokers still perceive lighter coloured packs to be less hazardous.

Standardised packaging will include requirements that packs are a standard drab colour and have large graphic health warnings on the front and back. Security features, including number codes and covert anti-counterfeit marks that can be read

by scanners, will be retained, so it will be no easier to counterfeit products, despite claims to the contrary from the tobacco industry.

Most smokers start before the age of 18 and the younger the age at which they start the greater the health risk. There is no time to lose, and parliament must act now to protect children from the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry.

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Full list of authors at: www.bmj.com/content/347/bmj.f4493/rr/674973.

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- 3 Germain D, Wakefield MA, Durkin SJ. Adolescents' perceptions of cigarette brand image: does plain packaging make a difference? *J Adolesc Health* 2010;46:385-92.
- 4 Morgenstern M, Poelen EAP, Scholte R, Karlsdóttir S, Jonsson SH, Mathis F, et al. Smoking in movies and adolescent smoking: cross-cultural study in six European countries. *Thorax* 2011; doi:10.1136/thoraxjnl-2011-200489.

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