



Scottish Coalition on Tobacco calls for strong and effective measures on youth smoking prevention

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Introduction

During the coming months, the Scottish Government will introduce a Health Bill as part of its legislative programme. The bill will include measures aimed at preventing young people from becoming smokers. This short briefing sets out some of the key facts on the impacts of Scotland's smoking habit and calls for strong and effective measures to reduce the numbers of young Scots who become smokers each year.

The health impacts of smoking

- Smoking is the biggest single preventable cause of ill-health and premature death in Scotland, accounting for almost one in four of all deaths.¹
- Among men, 40% of all cancer deaths and 91% of lung cancer deaths are attributable to smoking. For women, the figures are 29% and 88% respectively.²
- Smoking is also associated with cancers of the pancreas, stomach, bladder, liver, kidney, larynx, oesophagus, oral cavity and cervix, and with myeloid leukaemia.^{3 4}
- Living with a smoker increases the risk of adult-onset asthma fivefold.⁵
- Mortality from heart disease is up to 85% higher in smokers compared to non-smokers.⁶
- For men and women aged between 35 and 69, 22 years of life were lost on average per death from smoking.⁷

Smoking and health inequalities

- Smoking rates in the most deprived communities is almost four times higher than among the most affluent communities.⁸
- Around half of the reduced life expectancy faced by poor communities is accounted for by tobacco use.⁹
- Young smokers from deprived backgrounds are more likely to carry on smoking into adulthood than young smokers from more affluent backgrounds.¹⁰

Smoking and young people

- In 2005-06, 15,000 young Scots between the ages of 13 and 24 became smokers.¹¹
- 15% of Scottish 15 year olds classify themselves as regular smokers. Girls are more likely than boys to be smokers.¹²
- Over two thirds of smokers begin smoking before the age of 18, with less than one fifth beginning after the age of 20.¹³
- The younger a child begins smoking, the more likely they are to smoke more heavily into adulthood.¹⁴
- A child who begins smoking aged 14 is five times more likely to die of lung cancer than someone who starts smoking aged 24.¹⁵
- Children whose parents smoke are 1.5 times more likely to develop asthma.¹⁶
- Almost half of 13 year old smokers, and over 80% of 15 year olds bought their own cigarettes, particularly from newsagents and sweet shops.¹⁷
- Between a quarter and a third of shopkeepers, when subject to test purchase activity, persist in selling tobacco to under-age customers.^{18 19 20}
- Between 2001 and 2007, there were only 17 successful prosecutions for sales of tobacco to under-age customers in Scotland.²¹
- Children and young people are more likely to begin smoking if they are exposed to regular tobacco marketing.^{22 23 24 25}
- Visible displays of tobacco can prompt impulse purchase of cigarettes.²⁶
- Retail tobacco marketing undermines government health messages about the dangers of smoking.^{27 28}

Conclusion

Scotland needs a **Health Bill** that includes:

- a **licensing system for all tobacco retailers**, to make it easier for trading standards officers to prevent sales of tobacco to children and young people
- **decisive action to prevent youth access** to tobacco, including through vending machines
- an **end to all retail and promotional displays** of tobacco products.

Measures such as these, shown to be effective at helping to reduce youth smoking prevalence and youth access to tobacco when implemented elsewhere in the world,^{29 30} are vital if we are to prevent a new generation of children from becoming smokers. Youth smoking prevention can also help to break the cycle of ill-health and deprivation that contributes to the appalling health inequalities that blight modern Scotland.

The Scottish Parliament will shortly be called upon to scrutinise the government's Health Bill. The bill represents an opportunity to take a major step forward in regulating the sale of tobacco products to young people, and to make a significant contribution to our nation's long term health prospects.

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