

# UK Passes Law to Require Plain Cigarette Packaging in England

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Last week the House of Commons voted 367 to 113 in favour of packaging which is uniform in shape, size and design, featuring only the brand name and the usual graphic health warnings. The bill passed through the House of Lords without a vote.

England trails Ireland, which introduced similar legislation earlier this month, and Australia, which implemented it in 2012. Other regions in the UK have said they will introduce [similar legislation](#).

The news has been welcomed by various health charities. Cancer Research UK said that standard packs will “prevent young people from taking up smoking and ultimately help save lives”, adding that “this is a big step as we move towards our goal of a tobacco-free generation”.

Amanda Sandford, information manager for Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) says her organisation has been campaigning for this for some time and believes the move will help prevent children being attracted to smoking.

“There is evidence that the current colourful glitzy packaging of cigarettes recruits children, as they find them more attractive,” she says. “They are more inclined to think positively about smoking and take it up. We’ve already seen falling smoking rates as a result of plain packaging in Australia.”

She adds that she thinks existing smokers trying to quit will benefit from the new packaging, as they will be confronted with reality of smoking every time they pick up the pack instead of the imagery of traditional branding.

However, director of Forest, Simon Clarke, a UK-based media and political lobbying group that opposes smoking bans and discrimination against smokers and runs a [Hands Off](#) campaign against plain packaging, says the ban is “gesture politics” on the behalf of David Cameron’s Conservative party and “a distraction of what really matters to the people”.

According to a poll commissioned by Forest last month, parliament should “prioritise tackling [immigration and terrorism](#), not plain packaging of cigarettes”.

“We’re fairly disgusted that the government, after two public consultations, have ignored the public,” he says. “This is a policy built on the fallacy that packaging helps stop children smoking, but there is no evidence kids start smoking because of the packaging. Evidence points to peer pressure or the influence of family members who smoke.”

He accuses the government of “gold-plating” EU policy, citing a raft of new measures introduced in the revised EU [Tobacco Products Directive](#), such as the increased size of health warnings on packets, which renders this bill pointless.

He says his organisation would have supported a much bigger clamp down on shopkeepers who sell cigarettes to under 18s and a ban on ‘proxy purchasing’ (adults buying cigarettes and passing them on to children), believing this more “practical”.

He adds: “If I was in the food and drink industry I’d be concerned about this development. We’re already hearing talk about restricting advertising for alcohol and packaging on other so called unhealthy products like fatty or sugary food. There’s a much bigger issue here than just tobacco.”

Simon Evans, a spokesperson for Imperial Tobacco Group PLC, says the legislation has left the company “no choice” but to take legal action to defend their rights.

But Sandford, says there’s no reason why standardised packaging will be any more or less difficult to produce counterfeit than it is at present as the packs will still feature graphic and written warnings and the covert markings that they do now.