

Smokefree Generation



SPECTRUM

SHAPING PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES
TO REDUCE INEQUALITIES AND HARM

Smokefree Generation

Despite substantial progress in reducing smoking among young people,

there are still around 400,000 11-15 year olds in England who have tried smoking and 100,000 who are current smokers.

The vast majority of adult smokers started as children. Introducing additional measures that would prevent youth uptake could save lives in the future. These are proposed in the [Tobacco and Vapes Bill](#), four nation's legislation introduced in the UK parliament in November 2024. Research was key to making the case for the measures in the Bill and will be central to assessing its implementation.

Impacts

SPECTRUM researchers conducted a series of studies that directly informed an [independent review into smokefree policies](#) published in June 2022. Among other measures, this recommended raising the age of sale of tobacco from 18 by one year, every year until no one can buy a tobacco product, creating a smokefree generation.

The review did not immediately result in policy changes, so SPECTRUM researchers worked with our partner Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and our knowledge brokers in the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) to build evidence to inform legislation, publishing new findings on smoking prevalence, modelling policy options and contributing to an All Parliamentary Party Group report.

In October 2023 the UK Government published [Stopping the Start: our new plan to create a smokefree generation](#), citing a range of studies conducted by SPECTRUM researchers and proposing legislation to make it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after January 2009.

A four nations consultation followed that our research teams responded to and during the consultation period we had a series of meetings with Ministers and advisers including the Chief Medical Officer for England (CMO). The Bill followed with our studies cited in the [appendix to the command paper](#). After the Bill did not pass due to the early election, Labour re-introduced it in November 2024. SPECTRUM researchers attended meetings with the CMO, and the CMO and Minister for Public Health between June and November 2024 to discuss refinements and improvements to the Bill.



About the research

SPECTRUM research that informed the Bill included results from [a study](#) finding that in England, the rate of decline in smoking prevalence stagnated during the COVID-19 pandemic through to 2022. At the start of the pandemic, a potential reduction in smoking prevalence among middle-aged adults and increases in quitting among smokers may have been offset by an increase in smoking among young adults, emphasising the need for smoking prevention measures. The slowing in the rate of decline was pronounced in more advantaged social grades. Data were from 101,960 adults (≥ 18 years) participating in the Smoking Toolkit Study, a monthly representative household survey, between June 2017 and August 2022.

[Another paper](#) demonstrated the growing public support for tobacco control policies across Great Britain between 2021 and 2023. This included support for raising the sales age of tobacco by one year every year – the smokefree generation policy.

SPECTRUM papers relating to the continued prevalence of [menthol cigarette smoking](#) after [their ban in 2020](#), increases in [hand-rolled cigarette](#) smoking and [non-cigarette tobacco smoking prevalences](#) has also informed policy recommendations in the APPG report on all these issues, and papers on the [use of disposables](#) and [the use of different strengths of nicotine e-liquids](#) informed the disposables ban and new tax for e-liquids.

The team conducted modelling with colleagues from ASH for the APPG on Smoking and Health report [A new Manifesto for a Smokefree Future](#). The report included economic analysis showing that:

A ‘polluter pays’ levy on tobacco manufacturers could raise up to £700 million annually.

The cost of smoking to public finances in England was £21 billion in 2023, nearly double the total tobacco tax revenues of £11 billion. (excise taxes and VAT)

The APPG’s recommendations could save £3.1 billion for the public purse during the course of the next parliament.

The SPECTRUM modelling work gauging the potential impact of the different policy recommendations was subsequently included in the appendix of the UK Government’s command paper setting out the proposed actions to tackle smoking and youth vaping in November 2023. When the new Labour government re-introduced the bill, they cited [SPECTRUM work](#) that estimated around 127,500 18- to 25-year-olds in the United Kingdom were still becoming regular smokers each year, and [another paper](#) that reported the number of adults in England who vape but have never regularly smoked rose rapidly between 2021 and 2024, particularly in younger age groups.



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