INTRODUCTION

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United Kingdom (UK), accounting for over 77,000 deaths and an estimated £2.5 billion in health care costs each year in England alone.[1] On 20 May 2016, The Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations came into force in the UK. The regulations aim to curb the tobacco industry's use of packaging elements such as colours, design, shape, and size in order to decrease the appeal of tobacco products, reduce misperceptions about the harm of tobacco products, and increase the effectiveness of the health warnings. Standardised packaging (also known as plain packaging) is recommended in the World Health Organization's Framework for Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 11 and the Article 13 Guidelines.[2,3]

A growing number of countries have introduced standardised packaging legislation or are in the process of implementing legislation. As of January 2020, 12 countries have fully implemented standardised packaging: Australia (2012); France and the UK (2017); New Zealand, Norway, and Ireland (2018); Uruguay, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand (2019); and Turkey, Israel, and Slovenia (Jan 2020). By January 2022, Canada, Belgium, Hungary, and Singapore will have fully implemented their standardized packaging laws. [4] Numerous other countries are in the process of implementing laws or are formally considering legislation. There is some variation across countries in terms of what the regulations cover.[5] For example, some countries specify a pack structure and pack size, and in Canada and New Zealand, legislation includes restrictions on cigarette stick dimensions to ban slim cigarettes.

Since 2002, the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Policy Evaluation Project has conducted longitudinal surveys among representative cohorts of smokers in 29 countries to evaluate the impact of key tobacco control policies, such as standardised packaging. In 2014, the ITC Project and British Heart Foundation prepared a report urging UK policymakers to adopt standardised packaging.[6] The report presented evidence from ITC Project surveys of smokers in Australia showing stronger support for the law, more salient health warnings, and lower cigarette pack appeal after standardised packaging was implemented. The report also showed that UK smokers’ support for a standardised packaging law was even higher than support among Australian smokers before their law was implemented.

This report is a follow up to the 2014 report to present ITC Project evidence on the impact of the UK standardised packaging law one year after full implementation. For more information on the ITC Project, see www.itcproject.org

Standardised Packaging in the United Kingdom

The Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 require all packages of cigarettes and rolling tobacco to have a standardised colour, pack opening, and minimum pack size (20 cigarettes or 30g of rolling tobacco) with no branding elements other than the brand name, which can only appear in a mandated font and location on the pack. The regulations require cuboid shaped cigarette packs, but permit these to have rounded or bevelled edges, and allow flip-top packs or shoulder boxes—packs with a “clam shell” style hinged lid.[7] Tobacco retailers were given a one year sell-through period to comply with the law, so that all cigarettes and rolling tobacco products in the UK had to be sold in standardised packaging by 20 May 2017.

The regulations were implemented along with the European Union Tobacco Products Directive (TPD), which was incorporated into law through the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 (TRPR). The TRPR mandated further restrictions on packaging and branding, including the removal of information about the tar, nicotine, or carbon monoxide content and the introduction of new, larger health warnings. As of May 2017, all tobacco packages in the UK required combined pictorial and text warnings covering at least 65% of the principal display areas and text warnings on at least 50% of the secondary display areas. This represents an increase in size from previous health warnings (text warnings on 43% of the front and pictorial warnings on 53% of the back of packs).
ITC PROJECT EVIDENCE ON IMPACT OF STANDARDISED PACKAGING

ITC Smoking and Vaping Survey

This report presents data from ITC surveys conducted in England in 2016 and 2018 among a sample of over 4,000 adult smokers to evaluate the pre-post policy impact of the standardised packaging regulations. Results are compared with data from three other ITC countries where parallel surveys were conducted over the same time period, and which vary in the status of their packaging laws (see Table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Status of standardised packaging legislation</th>
<th>Status of pictorial health warnings (PHWs) on cigarette packs at time of 2016 and 2018 surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Implemented since December 2012</td>
<td>PHWs on 75% front/90% back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Will come into force in February 2020</td>
<td>PHWs on 75% front/75% back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>Full implementation by May 2017</td>
<td>Change from text on 43% of front/PHWs on 53% back to PHWs on 65% front and back in May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Has not yet been proposed</td>
<td>Text only on sides of packs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further details on the sample and survey methods in each country are available in the ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Survey technical report, available at https://itcproject.org/methods/technical-reports/.[8]

Did health warnings become more noticeable after the change in regulations?

ANSWER: Yes

One of the aims of standardised packaging is to enhance the salience and effectiveness of health warnings. ITC evidence from England and Australia support this.

After the implementation of standardised packaging with larger health warnings in England, there was a dramatic increase in the percentage of smokers who said they usually notice warning labels first when they look at a cigarette pack (from 24% in 2016 to 52% in 2018), versus other aspects of the pack such as branding (see Figure 1).

Similarly, after the introduction of standardised packaging with larger health warnings in Australia in 2012, the percentage of smokers who reported noticing warnings before other aspects of the pack increased,[6] and has remained high (50% in 2018).

After standardised packs with larger health warnings were introduced in England, smokers were more than twice as likely to notice health warnings on packs first before branding.
Did the change in regulations reduce the appeal of packs?

**ANSWER: Yes**

ITC results from England support evidence from Australia showing that standardised packaging with larger health warnings significantly reduces the appeal of tobacco packages.

Similar to previous findings from Australia,[6] there was a large increase in the percentage of smokers in England who said they did not like the look of their cigarette pack “at all” after the implementation of standardised packaging (from 16% in 2016 to 53% in 2018) (see Figure 2).

In contrast, the percentage of smokers who reported not liking the look of their packs decreased in both Canada and the United States over the same period.

The percentage of smokers who don’t like the look of their pack remains highest in Australia—where packs are not only standardised, but also have the largest health warnings of the four countries—and did not change from 2016 to 2018.

ITC cross-country data1 from 13 countries also shows the effectiveness of standardised packaging legislation in reducing the appeal of packs, as Australia (77%) and England (60%) have the highest percentage of smokers who do not like the look of their pack (see Figure 3). In contrast, in the United States, which has not implemented standardised packaging nor pictorial warnings, only 11% of smokers dislike the look of their pack.

1. Note that the 2018 results presented in Figure 3 may vary slightly from the 2018 results in Figure 2 due to differences in adjustment methods.

Smokers in countries with standardised packs (England and Australia) are most likely to dislike the look of their cigarette pack.

In contrast, in the United States, where cigarette packs have neither pictorial warnings nor standardised packaging, smokers are among the least likely to dislike the look of their pack.
Did smokers’ support for standardised packaging change in England?

**ANSWER: Yes, support increased**

In 2018, support for standardised packaging among adult smokers in England was the highest of the four countries and increased from 32% before the law to 44% after the law was fully implemented in 2017 (see Figure 4). The percentage of smokers who disagreed that cigarettes should be sold in standardised packages also decreased after the law (from 32% to 18%).

Support was also high in Australia, where standardised packaging has been in place since 2012, and was lowest in the United States, where there are no plans to introduce standardised packaging legislation.

These results are similar to the increase in support that was found in Australia after the introduction of their standardised packaging legislation. [6,9] The findings are also consistent with surveys of more than 12,000 adults in Great Britain conducted for Action on Smoking and Health (ASH (UK)) in 2018 and 2019. [10] These show that support in the adult population overall continued to increase after the law was fully implemented in 2017 (from 58% in 2018 to 63% in 2019). Support continued to increase among both smokers (from 29% to 33%) and non-smokers (62% to 68%). The overall percentage of adults opposing the law in Great Britain after it was implemented remained at 11% in both 2018 (32% of smokers and 8% of non-smokers) and 2019 (34% of smokers and 8% of non-smokers in 2019). Thus, only a minority were opposed to the law. The survey question and set of possible response options in the ASH survey were slightly different than in the ITC survey, leading to slightly different results.

2. The ASH Smokefree GB Survey 2018 was undertaken by YouGov online from 8 February to 6 March 2018. The total sample size was 12,767. The ASH Smokefree GB Survey 2019 was undertaken by YouGov online from 12 February to 10 March 2019. The reported data have been weighted and are representative of all adults in Great Britain (aged 18+).
There is strong evidence from the ITC Project and other studies, including several major systematic reviews, demonstrating the effectiveness of standardised packaging. The evidence thus far should encourage other countries to accelerate implementation of this policy with short transition periods for full compliance at the retail level and the UK to maintain or even enhance its policy. Standardised packaging legislation should be as comprehensive as possible, including measures to curb the appeal of brand and variant names, pack dimensions and structures, and cigarette designs.

The global evidence base on the effectiveness of this policy will continue to expand as more countries implement standardised packaging laws and as more studies become available evaluating the longer-term impact of such laws. Future studies should help to differentiate the effects of standardised packaging from enhanced health warnings. The ITC Project is evaluating the impact of the 2018 standardised packaging law in New Zealand and will evaluate the impact of Canada’s law after its full implementation in February 2020. Evaluations are also being planned in several other ITC countries where standardised packaging is under formal consideration.
REFERENCES


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This report is available at the following websites:
British Heart Foundation: https://www.bhf.org.uk/
International Tobacco Control (ITC) Policy Evaluation Project: www.itcproject.org

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