

This response was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on *Public Health: ethical issues* between May and September 2006. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Anon 3

Public health: ethical issues CONSULTATION PAPER Nuffield council on bioethics

Smoking

Class: 9W

Introductory lesson: 13th June 2006

Main lesson: 20th June 2006

What are the benefits and drawbacks of smoking being banned in all public places? Students debated this in pairs with only one of the pair speaking, then the 'listener' moved to the adjacent speaker and 'listener' conveyed the views of the first speaker to the new 'listener'.

Then I read the class the short paragraph on smoking, 'The health risks of smoking have been known for many years and smoking is a causative factor in at least 20 diseases.....'

Homework: Should smokers be made to pay a premium for health care, or be denied treatment at all? – collected in following lesson

p7-top of p8 of consultation document read to class.

Students numbered 1-5. All 1s together, 2s together, etc.

Given one briefing sheet per group and given the following instructions:

- Read through briefing sheet
- Note down any words that you do not understand
- Pick out 2 facts that surprised you
- If you were an MP what 2 laws would you introduce to apply in this country?

Whole class discussion followed group discussions. Interestingly the facts that surprised most groups were those that have been starred (4 facts).

The laws that were suggested included:

- Ban smoking in all public places
- Also in households where there are children under 12
- Tobacco companies should pay an additional premium directly to the NHS to cover treatment of those who choose to smoke
- Smokers should go to the bottom of NHS waiting lists but should not be denied treatment

Students asked to complete questions for homework anonymously.

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Smoking as a public health risk

Issues for public health are also raised by products that, in dietary terms, are completely unnecessary. These include alcohol, tobacco and a range of recreational drugs that have been classified as illegal. The health risks of smoking have been known for several decades and are well documented. Smoking is associated with increased morbidity and mortality and is linked to more than 20 different causes of death, including certain cancers, respiratory diseases and circulatory diseases. Some of the health effects are experienced not only by smokers themselves, but also, to a lesser extent, by those around them who breathe in their smoke (passive smoking).

Facts and figures

- In 2004, around 23% of both men and women aged 16 and over in the UK were regular smokers.⁴⁸ These levels have declined from the highest recorded prevalences of around 80% for men, during the late 1940s and 1950s, and around 45% for women, during the 1960s.⁴⁹
- Since the early 1990s, the highest prevalence of smoking has been seen in the 20–24 age group.
- Data for 12–15 year olds from 2000 show that 10% of boys and 14% of girls in England, and 9% of boys and 15% of girls in Scotland, were regular smokers.⁵⁰
- An estimate of dependence on cigarettes can be obtained from statistics on when a smoker has their first cigarette each day. In 2004, 17% of smokers had their first cigarette within five minutes of waking, indicating high dependence.⁵¹
- Smoking is most common in the manual occupations sector, in which 28% of people smoke regularly, and least common in the managerial and professional sector, in which 17% of people smoke regularly.
- Each year, over 120,000 deaths in the UK and more than 225,000 hospital admissions can be attributed to smoking.
- Smoking is estimated to cost the NHS up to £1,700 million each year in terms of GP visits, prescriptions, treatment and operations.⁵²
- There are also costs arising from those incapacitated by smoking-related diseases, and costs of fires caused by careless smokers.⁵³
- In the case of passive smoking, the effects are more difficult to quantify⁵⁴:
 - It is thought that several hundred people each year die from lung cancer as a result of passive smoking, and slightly more from heart disease.
 - The most vulnerable group exposed to other people's smoke is children. It has been estimated that 17,000 hospital admissions each year in children under five years of age are caused by their parents' smoking. Lung illnesses, glue ear, cot death and asthma are all more likely to occur in children whose parents smoke than in those whose parents do not.
- Women who smoke during pregnancy may harm their unborn child. The risks include reduced birth weight and certain health problems. Carcinogens (cancer-causing substances) have also been found to pass to the unborn child. In 2000 19% of women smoked throughout pregnancy.⁵⁵