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Smoking bans across the world

Sweden becomes first country to be officially declared “smoke free”

Sweden has made anti-smoking history by becoming the first country in the world to be officially declared ‘smoke free,’ new government figures reveal.

The data, released by Sweden’s public health agency, shows that just 4.5 per cent of Swedish-born adults now smoke - well under the globally recognized benchmark of five per cent to achieve smoke free status.

The Scandinavian country has hit the impressive milestone 16 years ahead of the European Union target, which most of its fellow member states are set to miss by some distance.

Average smoking rates in Europe currently sit at 24 per cent - five times higher than Sweden. .

Vapes are the key to Sweden’s anti-smoking success

Sweden says its anti-smoking success is down to its pioneering approach to vaping and other nicotine alternatives that are far safer than cigarettes.

Dr. Anders Milton, a physician and former president and CEO of the Swedish Medical Association, says: “Key to Sweden’s success is its pragmatic focus on harm reduction rather than prohibition.

“The Swedish government also applies a proportional excise tax, keeping smoke-free products more affordable than cigarettes. This tax policy, coupled with public education campaigns, has empowered Swedish consumers to make healthier choices and contributed to the country’s leading role in tobacco harm reduction.”

Dr. Delon Human, leader of Smoke Free Sweden, said Sweden’s “outstanding achievement” marks a major moment in global health that should inspire the rest of the world. He said: “In the early 1960s, nearly half of Swedish men smoked. By embracing and encouraging the use of alternative nicotine products such as snus, oral nicotine pouches and vapes, Sweden has paved a clear path to a smoke-free society

while safeguarding public health.”

The new statistics show that 5.3 per cent of all adults in Sweden - including immigrants - currently smoke. Remarkably, it reveals that people born elsewhere in Europe would be three times more likely to smoke if they had not moved to Sweden.

Far-reaching health benefits

The health benefits of Sweden’s successful anti-smoking strategy are far reaching.

A landmark report earlier this year shows that Sweden has the lowest percentage of tobacco-related diseases in the EU and a 41 per cent lower incidence of cancer than other European countries.

Despite Sweden proving that a progressive policy towards vaping and nicotine alternatives works to greatly reduce smoking rates, other countries have pressed ahead with strict bans. This has caused them to stall - or even go backwards - in their bids to become smoke free.

Dr. Human said: “Smoke Free Sweden calls on all countries to re-evaluate their tobacco control strategies and adopt harm reduction as a central pillar in their fight against smoking.

Sweden’s smoke free status should be a wake-up call to policymakers across the globe: progressive, science-backed policies on nicotine alternatives can make smoking history without sacrificing public health goals.”

“Rather than follow Sweden’s lead, these nations are heading in the opposite direction, with smoking prevalence stagnating or even rising. Sweden’s success is living proof that alternative nicotine products are a powerful force for positive change when supported by evidence-based policies.

Vaping safer than smoking for respiratory health, study finds

The latest research reiterates that unlike smoking, vaping has no significant effects on respiratory health.

While many health organizations and professionals assume that vaping must have adverse effects on respiratory health, studies have actually shown that exclusive e-cigarette use, particularly among those with no prior smoking history, is associated with minimal respiratory symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath. More importantly, smokers who switch from smoking to vaping, including those who suffer from serious conditions such as COPD, consistently report improved respiratory symptoms. Hence experts in the field emphasize the importance of distinguishing between the effects of vaping and smoking, as conflating the two can misrepresent risks. A recent study published in *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* reiterated that people who switch entirely from smoking to vaping experience notable improvements in respiratory symptoms like wheezing and coughing. Using data from the PATH study, which tracks tobacco use across the U.S., researchers categorized participants into four groups: those who quit nicotine entirely, those who switched exclusively to vaping, those who kept smoking cigarettes, and those who smoked while starting to vape.

In line with previous findings, the results indicated that participants who fully switched to vaping experienced a reduction in wheezing. The research team concluded that this indicates that partial transitions or dual use fail to provide the respiratory benefits associated with completely switching away from smoking.

Similarly, an international study under the VERITAS project has shed new light on the respiratory health of individuals who exclusively use e-cigarettes without a prior history of smoking. Published in *Scientific Reports*, and conducted by CoEHAR and global collaborators, this pioneering research addressed a

critical research gap by focusing on vapers without smoking-related confounders, by comparing respiratory health between exclusive e-cigarette users and a control group who had never smoked or vaped. The results indicated that exclusive vapers without a smoking history did not exhibit significant clinical respiratory issues.

Vapers prefer flavoured disposable vapes

More specifically, indicated the results, among approximately 750 participants, 83.3% reported “rarely” or “never” experiencing respiratory issues such as coughing or shortness of breath. And while vapers scored slightly higher on the Respiratory Symptom Evaluation Scale (RSES), the difference was negligible and not clinically significant. Interestingly, disposable vapes were the most preferred device type, with fruit flavours being particularly popular. This latter finding should raise an alarm given the wave of bans on disposable devices and vape flavours, spreading across the globe.

Context is everything

Ultimately, all experts agree that evaluating the relationship between vaping and respiratory health, must be done in the context of the role of vaping as a harm reduction tool for smokers, seeking to quit or reduce risks. For these individuals, switching to vaping is a scientifically supported strategy to mitigate the damage caused by combustible tobacco. In this context, promoting vaping as a cessation aid aligns with public health objectives to reduce smoking-related disease and death.

<https://www.vapingpost.com/2024/11/22/more-studies-confirm-that-vaping-is-significantly-safer-than-smoking-for-respiratory-health/?fbclid=IwY2xjaWHEvZdleHRuA2FibQlxMAABHXEBLuiONGfxqcMSmC4pVUGZI-dERaWtk0R35kiY-1xeoOA>

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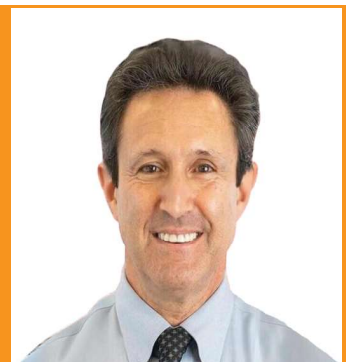
U.S. Surgeon General overlooks key science on smoking cessation, says Cliff Douglas

It's great to see that the U.S. Surgeon General is highlighting smoking cessation as a vital strategy for improving public health. The latest Surgeon General's report confirms that certain actions, including banning menthol cigarettes and a significantly reducing nicotine in cigarettes, could lead many adults to quit while preventing others from starting. Unfortunately, the same report misses a major component science-baked smoking cessation strategies by failing to include any material on dramatic differences in the risks posed by different tobacco and nicotine products. The continuum of risk of nicotine products as detailed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration describes how not all nicotine consumption contributes to the disease and death caused by smoking. Combustible tobacco, including cigarettes and cigars, is by far the most dangerous way to consume

nicotine. Products on the other end of the continuum, such as FDA-authorized e-cigarettes, snus, and heated (not burned) tobacco products, reduce a consumer's risk for disease. For adults who have not been able to quit by using traditional nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs), or who are simply unwilling to do so, these reduced-risk alternatives can be life-saving.

<https://globalactiontoendsmoking.org/news-and-press/>

[press/the-surgeon-general-s-report-overlooks-key-science-on-smoking-cessation-cliff-douglas/](https://globalactiontoendsmoking.org/news-and-press/the-surgeon-general-s-report-overlooks-key-science-on-smoking-cessation-cliff-douglas/)



Despite everything, more people than ever choose safer nicotine options

By Kiran Sidhu

The latest report of the Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction (GSTHR) estimates that global sales of safer alternatives to combustible tobacco have grown six-fold since 2015.

"This growth indicates that SNP have moved beyond their niche status," it states. "In 2015, SNP accounted for only 1.4% of the total tobacco and nicotine market. By 2024, this figure had increased to 8.8%, with [heated tobacco products] at 4.2%, nicotine vaping products at 3.2%, nicotine pouches at 1.1%, and snus at 0.3%."

Excluding China's vast tobacco market from the total makes the impact elsewhere even clearer, the report notes. China accounts for over one third of the world's combustible tobacco sales; despite the country being the world's biggest manufacturer of vapes, few are sold domestically. Without China, 12.3 percent of the world's tobacco and nicotine sales are now of safer products—up from practically zero in 2004. Shapiro and his coauthors draw on various evidence to show how these sales are associated with declines in smoking, at rates far faster than traditional tobacco control measures have achieved. But this global transition is often happening despite, not because of, countries' governments—and going slower than it would if governments were supportive. Sweden is a standout success story. It just became the world's first country to reach "smoke free" status, with a smoking rate below 5 percent. But even there, Shapiro doesn't give the authorities much credit.

"To be honest, I'm not sure the government did much to encourage this," Shapiro said. "It has basically been the result of Swedish smokers acknowledging the dangers of smoking—allied to an available, accessible, affordable and acceptable product in the form of snus."

Meanwhile, close to one third of the world's population still cannot legally buy any safer nicotine alternatives like vapes, pouches or heated tobacco products. And though residents of nearly 130 countries can access at least one of those options, very few can access all of them in a way that would best position different people to quit smoking.

Combustible tobacco is available everywhere, and claims 8.9 million lives each year, according to the report.

"Those against tobacco harm reduction don't want people to use safer nicotine products," he said, describing what amounts

to support for cigarette sales.

Shapiro said that overall, the report "demonstrates the potential for SNP to make a significant contribution to reducing death and disease from smoking and the use of dangerous oral [tobacco] products."

That's because simply allowing people to access SNP requires little expenditure; governments just "need to create an environment which encourages adult smokers to switch away from smoking," Shapiro said.

Among the levers governments should use to encourage safer choices is taxation, he continued. Imposing no tax on SNP can go a long way to making them a more attractive option than heavily-taxed cigarettes.

Regarding flavors—a big part of the attraction for adults, but so often a target for opponents of SNP, due to their perceived role in youth use—Shapiro suggested that New Zealand has a reasonable way to ward off such attacks. The country rules out "unnecessary flavor labels that might be seen to encourage youth vaping, but still allows many flavors and flavor descriptors," he said—retaining the substance of flavors' ability to aid switching.

Another thing Shapiro wants to see from governments is also free, yet often in short supply: courage.

"Those countries which have taken a more pragmatic approach, like the UK, should be more willing to openly endorse SNP," he said, "and not let the teen-vaping narrative dominate the story, which it does."

The report also discusses grassroots SNP consumer advocacy groups, and I asked Shapiro about their importance, as well as the barriers they face. "It is very hard for the voices of consumer groups to be heard when faced with a global network of well organized, well-funded NGOs—medical and public health organizations right up to the WHO," he replied.

It is in consumers, and the way more and more people are managing to make safer choices even when they've been deluged with misinformation, that tobacco harm reduction advocates can readily find hope.

Asked for the biggest takeaway from his new report, Shapiro's reply reflected this: "Despite all the hurdles, safer nicotine products are here to stay."

<https://filtermag.org/safer-nicotine-products-growth/>

Call for a comprehensive strategy to end combustible smoking in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partner organizations have called for a national strategy to address one of Pakistan's most critical public health challenges: combustible smoking.

"This is not merely an issue of health but one that impacts our society, economy, and future generations," said Arshad Ali Syed, project director of ARI. "We must learn from successful international examples like Sweden and adopt a comprehensive approach that includes innovative solutions and robust regulatory measures to help millions of Pakistanis live healthier, smoke-free lives."

With more than 31 million tobacco users in the country, over half of whom are smokers, the severe health consequences of smoking are well-documented, leading to preventable illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory disorders.

ARI and its partner organizations emphasize the necessity of combining reduced-risk products, effective smoking cessation services, and forward-thinking legislation to combat the tobacco crisis and guide Pakistan toward a smoke-free future. Research indicates that reduced-risk products can serve as a viable alternative for smokers who are unwilling or unable to quit traditional combustible cigarettes. Sweden is on the brink of becoming a smoke-free country, thanks in part to the widespread use of snus—a reduced-risk, smokeless tobacco product.

While not risk-free, products such as snus and other scientifically validated alternatives have shown potential in minimizing harm compared to combustible smoking. Introducing these alternatives as part of a comprehensive smoking reduction strategy could be a significant change for Pakistan.

Smoking bans across the world

The UK government is looking at introducing stricter rules on smoking outdoors to reduce deaths linked to tobacco use. This could mean banning smoking in places such as outside schools and hospitals.

The UK is not the only place that is aiming to expand its "smoke-free" spaces as many other countries are getting ever tougher on tobacco. Here's what you need to know about measures around the world to clamp down on smoking.

The UK government wants to ban smoking for younger generations

The previous Conservative government proposed a new law called the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which bans selling cigarettes or any other tobacco product to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009.

The bill didn't make it through parliament before the 2024 UK election.

The current Labour government has reintroduced the legislation, and revised the bill to extend some smoking restrictions. This includes the possibility of stopping smoking on certain premises such as playgrounds or outside schools and hospitals.

This policy is believed to have been inspired by New Zealand

New Zealand's previous government wanted to have a sweeping crackdown on smoking and introduced a law which meant anyone born after 2008 would not be able to buy cigarettes or tobacco products in their lifetime. It also restricted where tobacco could be sold.

But the current government elected in October 2023 moved to repeal the law saying it would help fund tax cuts.

Other countries are hoping to raise 'smoke-free generations'

Mexico has some of the strictest anti-smoking laws in the world, including an outright ban in all public spaces such as beaches, parks and hotels.

One of Australia's largest states, Queensland, has created several smoke-free public spaces, including restrictions on smoking at campsites, public swimming pools and playgrounds.

Canada is hoping to reduce tobacco use to less than 5% by 2035 and was one of the first countries to rule that health warnings should be printed on individual cigarettes.

Over 70 countries have 'smoke-free' policies that cover indoor places

In 2004, Ireland was the first country to pass a "smoke-free



law", according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The law banned smoking in workplaces, restaurants and bars. By 2007, just 10 countries had smoking bans covering indoor spaces, according to the WHO. Yet, by 2023, the WHO global tobacco report said around 5.6 billion people - 71% of the world's population - were covered by at least one smoke-free policy.

In South America, citizens of every country are now covered by anti-smoking laws

In 2006, Uruguay became the first country in the region to adopt smoke-free measures by enacting a ban on smoking in all public spaces and workplaces.

The law was widely supported by the public in Uruguay, including lots of the country's smokers.

In the EU, several countries have anti-smoking measures but they vary greatly

Denmark, Finland, Italy and Sweden have "very good" compliance with anti-smoking laws, according to Smoke Free Partnership, a group of European organisations. However, Bulgaria and Greece have a "weak" compliance with smoking laws.

In the UK, smoking has been banned in virtually all indoor places since July 2007

This includes smoking in any pub, restaurant and nightclub, as well as most workplaces. A smoking ban had already been introduced in Scotland in March 2006 and Wales and Northern Ireland in April 2007.

The 2014 Children and Families Act restricted smoking in cars carrying children.

Smoking rates in the UK are at their lowest on record, according to government figures. However, around 6 million adults are still smokers.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-67545363>

Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Global Action on Ending Smoking (GA), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

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