



## **Support for Amendments to Health Warnings on Tobacco Product Packets and Retail Containers**

**The University of Hong Kong School of Public Health (HKUSPH) strongly supports the captioned amendments**, which include increasing the size of health warnings to cover 85% of the largest two sides of cigarette packets, and increasing the number of graphic health warnings from 6 to 12, etc.

Smoking kills 1 in 2 users, possibly 2 in 3 if started young. Reducing smoking prevalence will save thousands of lives, particularly those of today's young people. However, the decline in Hong Kong's smoking prevalence has slowed down in recent years and 1 in 4 children are still exposed to secondhand smoke at home. Stronger measures are needed to further reduce smoking and the harms it poses on smokers and non-smokers. Depending on the design, cigarette packets can be used to promote sales or to warn smokers and non-smokers of the serious harms of tobacco. Our study in 2014-15 have found 74% of children and 70% of adolescents in Hong Kong saw tobacco product displays in retail stores in the past 7 days in 2014-15. In addition, 20% of children and adolescents in Hong Kong saw their parents' cigarette packets at home in the past 3 months.

In view that children and adolescents are frequently exposed to cigarette packets, the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health has commissioned HKUSPH to conduct a focus group study among primary and secondary school students on their perceptions towards cigarette packets during February to March 2017. Real-size cigarette packets with pictorial health warnings covering 50% (current design), 85% (proposed) and 100% (plain packaging) of the largest two surfaces of the packets were produced and shown to the students. Important findings are as follows:

### **Focus group interviews among Hong Kong primary and secondary school students**

1. Students' attention was drawn to the pictorial health warnings when they were given the 85% warning packets, but to the brand logos when given the 50% warning packets.
2. Compared with the current 50% warning packets, students found the 85% warning packets more harmful, more addictive and less attractive.
3. Plain packets with 100% pictorial health warnings were even more deterring than the 85% warning packets.

These findings support enlarging the health warnings to 85% now, with the aim to further expanding them to 100% in the future.

### **These amendments will likely have the following specific effects:**

1. Smokers will be more aware of the harms of smoking.
2. Children with smoking parents will find smoking less attractive.
3. Smokefree social norms will strengthen.
4. Use of quit line 1833183 and smoking cessation services will increase.
5. Tobacco use will decrease.
6. Smoking prevalence will decrease.

### **Conclusions**

Enlarging the health warnings on tobacco packet products and other proposed amendments are effective, evidence-based and recommended by the World Health Organisation. These measures

are urgently needed to further reduce the smoking prevalence and save thousands of lives, especially those of young people, including smokers and non-smokers exposed to tobacco smoke. On behalf of the University of Hong Kong School of Public Health, I urge all legislators to support these amendments, which are also supported by the public and are easy to implement and enforce. Failing this will be a terrible setback to tobacco control in Hong Kong and send a bad message that legislators are not after the best interest of the public's health.

Dr Daniel SY Ho  
Associate Professor  
School of Public Health  
University of Hong Kong

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(represented by Miss Mok Hoi Yan)