

# **The impact of cigarette pack design on perceptions of risk among UK adult and youth: evidence in support of plain packaging regulations.**

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## **Introduction**

It is illegal for tobacco manufacturers to use packaging to give the impression that some cigarettes are safer than others. This study examined perceptions of brand descriptors and designs currently appearing on UK cigarette packs and evaluated the impact of “plain packaging,” where these elements are removed.

## **Methods**

516 adult smokers and 806 youth aged 11 to 17 (smokers and nonsmokers) participated in an online survey. Participants were shown pairs of cigarette packages and asked to compare them on 5 measures: taste, tar delivery, health risk, attractiveness, and either ease of quitting (adult smokers) or which they would choose if trying smoking (youth).

## **Results**

Both adults and youth were significantly more likely to rate packages with the terms “smooth” and “gold” as lower tar, lower health risk, and either easier to quit (adults) or their choice of pack if trying smoking (youth) compared to “regular” varieties of the same brands. The use of lighter colours had a similar effect. For example, compared to *Marlboro Red*, *Marlboro Gold* (gold coloured chevron instead of red) was rated as lower tar by 65% of adult smokers, lower health risk by 53%, and easier to quit by 31%. Current packs were seen as more attractive than plain packs.

## **Conclusions**

Considerable proportions of youth and adults hold misleading perceptions of risk based on package design. Removing colour and brand design reduces these misperceptions and the attractiveness of brands. Current regulations have failed to remove potentially misleading information from tobacco packaging.

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