# Plain packaging could curb youth vaping without deterring adult smokers, study suggests



Recent research led by University College London (UCL) and King’s College London suggests that selling e-cigarettes, or vapes, in plain packaging could significantly reduce their appeal to children and young people without deterring adult smokers from using them as a cessation aid. The study, involving nearly 2,800 young people aged 11 to 18 and almost 4,000 adults, compared participants’ reactions to usual branded vape packs versus plain packaging with standardised or coded flavour descriptions. Results showed that over half of the young participants believed their peers would be interested in trying vapes in their usual colourful packaging, but this interest dropped to 38% when shown standardised packs. Meanwhile, adults’ interest in vapes remained largely unchanged regardless of packaging style, indicating that plain packaging would likely not discourage smokers seeking to quit through vaping.

The research highlights that the vibrant, branded designs and imaginative flavour names often used on vape packages are key marketing tools that attract children. By contrast, plain packaging with limited or coded flavour descriptions appeared to make the products less appealing to youth while retaining their attractiveness to adult smokers. Researchers, including lead author Dr Eve Taylor from UCL, emphasise the need for regulatory policies that strike a delicate balance between reducing youth uptake and maintaining vaping as a harm-reduction tool for smokers.

Supporting these findings, a complementary study published in JAMA Network Open by King’s College London and the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) involving over 2,400 teenagers and 12,000 adults found similar trends. Teenagers were more likely to report disinterest in vapes presented in standardised white or green packaging, while adult interest was unaffected by the changes. Dr Katherine East, the senior author of that study, stressed the importance of keeping vaping accessible to adult smokers while preventing use among non-smoking youth.

These studies come amid growing public health concerns about the rising rates of youth vaping, which health experts warn poses risks including nicotine addiction and unknown long-term effects. England’s chief medical officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, has publicly condemned marketing tactics aimed at children and underlined that vaping is considerably safer than smoking for adults but should not be used by non-smokers or minors.

In response, UK legislation is evolving to address these challenges. Earlier this year, a ban on disposable vapes was introduced to curb teenage vaping, and the Tobacco and Vapes Bill currently progressing through the House of Lords is expected to grant ministers the authority to regulate e-cigarette flavours, packaging, and display. Advocates, including Hazel Cheeseman, chief executive of ASH, urge Parliament to expedite the passage of the bill to enable detailed regulations aimed at protecting children while preserving vaping’s role as a smoking cessation aid.

While these findings reinforce the potential value of plain packaging as part of a wider public health strategy, experts caution it is only one component of addressing youth vaping. Broader educational, regulatory, and behavioural interventions will be necessary to comprehensively reduce vaping among children without undermining harm reduction efforts for adult smokers.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/call-for-plain-packaging-for-vapes-to-reduce-use-by-teenagers-FY6L62K6VFOAHAG6G6GF6UC52M/), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html), [[4]](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/headlines/2023/mar/removing-colourful-packaging-reduces-appeal-vaping-teenagers)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/call-for-plain-packaging-for-vapes-to-reduce-use-by-teenagers-FY6L62K6VFOAHAG6G6GF6UC52M/), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html), [[4]](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/headlines/2023/mar/removing-colourful-packaging-reduces-appeal-vaping-teenagers)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/standardised-packaging-on-vapes-reduces-appeal-to-teenagers), [[6]](https://www.vapebusiness.biz/study-finds-vape-plain-packaging-reduces-teenage-appeal-not-the-answer-industry-feels/), [[5]](https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/plain-packaging-could-reduce-appeal-e-cigarettes-young-people)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/call-for-plain-packaging-for-vapes-to-reduce-use-by-teenagers-FY6L62K6VFOAHAG6G6GF6UC52M/), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html), [[6]](https://www.vapebusiness.biz/study-finds-vape-plain-packaging-reduces-teenage-appeal-not-the-answer-industry-feels/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/call-for-plain-packaging-for-vapes-to-reduce-use-by-teenagers-FY6L62K6VFOAHAG6G6GF6UC52M/), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/call-for-plain-packaging-for-vapes-to-reduce-use-by-teenagers-FY6L62K6VFOAHAG6G6GF6UC52M/), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html), [[2]](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/standardised-packaging-on-vapes-reduces-appeal-to-teenagers)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/call-for-plain-packaging-for-vapes-to-reduce-use-by-teenagers-FY6L62K6VFOAHAG6G6GF6UC52M/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/standardised-packaging-on-vapes-reduces-appeal-to-teenagers> - A study by King's College London and Action on Smoking and Health found that standardising e-cigarette packaging by removing brand imagery decreases their appeal among teenagers. The research, published in JAMA Network Open, involved 2,469 teenagers aged 11-18 and 12,026 adults aged 18 and over. Participants were shown vape products in three packaging conditions: fully branded packs, standardised white packaging with a brand name, and standardised green packaging with a brand name. Teenagers were more likely to report that their peers would have no interest in vapes when marketed in standardised packaging, while adults' interest remained unaffected. The study suggests that regulating packaging could deter young people from using vapes without lessening their appeal to adults who smoke. Dr Katherine East, the study's senior author, emphasised the importance of making vapes available to adults who smoke to help them quit, while preventing non-smokers under 18 from using them. The study was supported by a Project Grant from Cancer Research UK. [Source](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/standardised-packaging-on-vapes-reduces-appeal-to-teenagers)
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html> - A new study suggests that selling vapes in plain packages could reduce their appeal to children. The research, led by UCL and King’s College London, involved 2,770 children and young people aged 11 to 18 and nearly 4,000 adults. Participants were shown vape packs in various forms: usual branded packs, plain white packs with standard flavour descriptions, plain packs with limited flavour descriptions, and standardised packs with flavour codes. Among the children, 53% believed their peers would be interested in trying vapes in usual packaging, which dropped to 38% with standardised packs. Among adults, interest remained similar regardless of packaging type. The researchers concluded that standardised packaging and limiting flavour descriptors reduced youth appeal but had minimal effect on adults’ interest or harm perception. [Source](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/experts-parliament-children-london-british-b1248943.html)
4. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/headlines/2023/mar/removing-colourful-packaging-reduces-appeal-vaping-teenagers> - Research from UCL and King's College London indicates that removing colourful packaging from e-cigarettes reduces their appeal to teenagers. The study, published in JAMA Network Open, involved 2,469 teenagers aged 11-18 and 12,026 adults aged 18 and over. Participants were shown vape products in three packaging conditions: fully branded packs, standardised white packaging with a brand name, and standardised green packaging with a brand name. Teenagers were more likely to report that their peers would have no interest in vapes when marketed in standardised packaging, while adults' interest remained unaffected. The study suggests that regulating packaging could deter young people from using vapes without lessening their appeal to adults who smoke. Dr Sarah Jackson from UCL's Institute of Epidemiology & Health noted that while standardising packaging may reduce e-cigarettes’ appeal to youth, it is likely only part of the solution. [Source](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/headlines/2023/mar/removing-colourful-packaging-reduces-appeal-vaping-teenagers)
5. <https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/plain-packaging-could-reduce-appeal-e-cigarettes-young-people> - A study published in JAMA Network Open suggests that standardised packaging of e-cigarettes could reduce their appeal among young people without affecting adults. The research involved 2,469 teenagers aged 11-18 and 12,026 adults aged 18 and over. Participants were shown vape products in three packaging conditions: fully branded packs, standardised white packaging with a brand name, and standardised green packaging with a brand name. Teenagers were more likely to report that their peers would have no interest in vapes when marketed in standardised packaging, while adults' interest remained unaffected. The study suggests that regulating packaging could deter young people from using vapes without lessening their appeal to adults who smoke. [Source](https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/plain-packaging-could-reduce-appeal-e-cigarettes-young-people)
6. <https://www.vapebusiness.biz/study-finds-vape-plain-packaging-reduces-teenage-appeal-not-the-answer-industry-feels/> - A study by King's College London and Action on Smoking and Health found that standardising vape packaging by removing brand imagery decreases their appeal among teenagers. The research, published in JAMA Network Open, involved 2,469 teenagers aged 11-18 and 12,026 adults aged 18 and over. Participants were shown vape products in three packaging conditions: fully branded packs, standardised white packaging with a brand name, and standardised green packaging with a brand name. Teenagers were more likely to report that their peers would have no interest in vapes when marketed in standardised packaging, while adults' interest remained unaffected. The study suggests that regulating packaging could deter young people from using vapes without lessening their appeal to adults who smoke. Dr Katherine East, the study's senior author, emphasised the importance of making vapes available to adults who smoke to help them quit, while preventing non-smokers under 18 from using them. [Source](https://www.vapebusiness.biz/study-finds-vape-plain-packaging-reduces-teenage-appeal-not-the-answer-industry-feels/)