News Release

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**Smokers across West Midlands encouraged to take part in Stoptober after smoking increases during pandemic**

***Stoptober is back and calling on smokers to join the 2.3 million people who have made quit attempts since the campaign’s launch a decade ago***

* **Around 651,000 adults in the West Midlands** still smoke[[1]](#footnote-1) **from over 6 million adult smokers in England** – and it remains the leading preventable cause of premature death, however, a recent consumer survey reports more than half of smokers want to quit[[2]](#footnote-2)

* The survey also found that nearly half of smokers (45%) smoked more since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, with boredom (43%) and anxiety (42%) commonly given as the reason for increased smoking2
* The *Stoptober* campaign launches for its 10th year encouraging smokers to give quitting a go and add to the 2.3 million quit attempts that have been made with the campaign since it launched a decade ago3

***Stoptober*** is back to launch its 10th mass quit attempt on 1st October, calling on smokers in England to join the 2.3 million others who have made a quit attempt with the campaign since it launched a decade ago in 2012[[3]](#footnote-3).

Over 6 million adults in England still smoke1, with more than 651,000 adult smokers in the West Midlands region, and it remains the leading cause of premature death[[4]](#footnote-4), with almost 75,000 preventable deaths a year[[5]](#footnote-5).

A new nationwide survey of 2,000 current smokers released today has found that nearly half (45%) have been smoking more since the first lockdown began2. Key reasons reported are due to being bored in the lockdowns (43%)or the pandemic making them more anxious (42%)2.

More than two fifths (43%)2 of smokers surveyed believe that the strength of addiction and/or craving is the biggest obstacle to quitting, followed by the stress of everyday life (42%)2. More than half of smokers want to quit, and three quarters (75%) would never have started smoking if they could go back in time 2. Of those who want to quit, more than half (55%) would like to do so to improve their physical health or to save money (52%)2.

Data from the monthly UCL Smoking Toolkit Study indicates a large increase in smoking among the under-35s since the coronavirus pandemic, up from 18% in 2019 to 24% now[[6]](#footnote-6).

The disruptive impact of the pandemic on smoking patterns make this year's Stoptober mass quit attempt more important than ever. Stopping smoking brings multiple benefits to health, some immediate and others that build over time. These include being able to start moving better, being able to breathe more easily and saving money. The average smoker can save £1,875.60[[7]](#footnote-7),[[8]](#footnote-8), a year by quitting smoking.

**Dr Lola Abudu, Director of Health and Wellbeing for Public Health England (PHE) West Midlands, said:** “This is the 10th anniversary of Stoptober, which has helped over 2 million people to quit. Rates of smoking in the West Midlands have continued to decline over the last decade, however the most recent data shows at least 14% of the region’s adults continue to put their health at risk from smoking. With the stresses of the pandemic, some people who quit may have taken up the habit again. We know around 45% of smokers have been smoking more since the first lockdown, due to boredom and anxiety. A recent survey shows smoking rates in young adults have increased during the pandemic, which makes this 10th anniversary Stoptober mass quit attempt even more important.

“Smoking damages the lungs and airways, making it harder to breathe. Each cigarette fills lungs with toxins which harm the immune system and leave us more vulnerable to infections, including COVID-19. However, it’s never too late to quit, and more than half of smokers want to kick the habit. If you can stop for 28 days, you’re five times more likely to quit for good. So this Stoptober, join thousands of people who have quit over the last 10 years; start breathing more easily, reduce the risk of lung and heart conditions and certain cancers, and save all the money that goes up in smoke to enjoy the things you missed during lockdowns.”

*Stoptober* is based on research that if a smoker can make it to 28 days smoke free, they are five times more likely to quit for good[[9]](#footnote-9). The campaign first launched in 2012 when one in five adults smoked (19.3%)[[10]](#footnote-10); this has since fallen to one seven in England (13.9%)[[11]](#footnote-11).

*Stoptober* offers a range of free quitting tools including: the NHS Quit Smoking app, Facebook messenger bot, Stoptober Facebook online communities, daily emails and SMS, and an online Personal Quit Plan. The Personal Quit Plan helps people find a combination of support that’s right for them, including expert support from local Stop Smoking Services and stop smoking aids.

**Scott Crosby, Tobacco Control Programme Manager at Public Health England said**: “Since the pandemic hit, we’ve seen an increase in 18 to 34-year-olds taking up smoking, which is why Stoptober is as vital as ever. Now in its 10th year it’s supported over two million smokers to give quitting a go.

“Quitting smoking will not only immediately improve your physical health but also your bank balance. Research shows that if you can make it to 28 days smoke free then you are five times more likely to quit for good.

“It’s been a tough time over the pandemic for smokers. But the numbers trying to quit is up and the success rate is up. Now is the time to do it! Sign up to Stoptober and make it a success.”

**Dr Sarah Jarvis, GP and media medic, said:** “Smoking is still the leading preventable cause of premature death. Every cigarette smoked damages the lungs and airways, making it harder to breathe. Smoking fills the lungs with toxins which harm the immune system and leave the smoker more vulnerable to infections – something which has been at the forefront of all our minds over the past 18 months.

“As a Doctor I urge every smoker to give quitting a go this October – it’s never too late to quit – stopping smoking brings immediate benefits to health, including for people with an existing smoking-related disease. There’s loads of support available including expert help from local stop smoking services, quit smoking aids and digital tools. You don’t need to do this alone.”

Leading UK health organisations including The Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation are joining in the call to get smokers in England to give quitting a go this October by joining Stoptober.

**Eluned Hughes, Head of Health Advice at Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation, said:** “Quitting smoking is one of the best things anyone can do to improve their overall health. Smoking seriously damages the lungs, putting people at greater risk of developing conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

“It is vital, now more than ever, that people protect their lungs by giving up this deadly habit. No matter how long you have been a smoker, it is never too late to give up, and if you do already have a lung condition, then quitting is one of the best things you can do to help yourself. As Stoptober marks its tenth anniversary, why not take the first step to quitting for good?”

Smokers are being urged to join the thousands of people who are stopping smoking this October. For free support to quit search ‘Stoptober’.

A short [new infographic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBM-Es7wy3A) has been released as part of the campaign, which highlights the changing smoking landscape in the last decade.

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| Anyone in the West Midlands region who’d be happy to share their quit story to encourage others to stop smoking should email: betterhealth@phe.gov.uk and mark the email *Stoptober quit story – for PHE West Midlands* |

For more information / interviews contact PHE West Midlands press office on 0121 232 9223/4 Out Of Hours 07834 311 393

**Notes to Editors**

* **Martin Dockrell, Tobacco Control Lead, Public Health England, said:** “The rise in the number of young adults who smoke highlights the vital need for campaigns such as Stoptober in supporting people up and down the country to quit.

“Incredible quitting progress has been made over the past ten years since Stoptober was launched. There are two million fewer smokers in England today than there were 10 years ago, and I would estimate around 90 billion fewer cigarettes have been smoked nationwide over the last decade.

“It is clear that campaigns and support for smokers, such as Stoptober, are vital in helping people to quit and maintaining motivation.”

* **Professor Jamie Brown, Director of the UCL Tobacco and Alcohol Research Group and the UCL Smoking Toolkit Study, said:**“It is important to acknowledge the rapid improvements stopping smoking brings to our health. Those who are quitting are making a marked improvement to their wellbeing and the number of those making successful quit attempts continues to rise.

“There is no better time to quit than right now and surrounded by those in England also taking part in Stoptober. Take advantage of the wealth of support available – it could ultimately save your life.”

**Supporting information**

* Stoptober’s new video content and images can be viewed and downloaded from the following link: [**HERE**](https://freud-my.sharepoint.com/%3Af%3A/g/personal/phoebe_knatchbull_freuds_com/EkAxlPKB3CtMrcXHugxBzmkBSRUWNSkLBVTac4xAsI7mpw?e=YAqXrs)
* **New attitudinal survey:** Carried out by independent survey agency Opinium. Online survey conducted across a representative sample of 2,000 smokers in England, 20th – 31st August 2021 over 18 years. Link to survey summary [here](https://freud-my.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/g/personal/isabel_evans_freuds_com/Eav76qL5n61MkJwU-J872CgBMQZrtC8F480A60nx2N_2tw?e=3cbb5V)
* **Visit** <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking> to find out more on what support is available
* **Comparative data samples**

The *Stoptober* campaign uses ONS statistical smoking prevalence data. 2021 data is currently delayed because of COVID-19 and due to be issued later this year. UCL Smoking Toolkit Study data pool contains an age 16+ in England sample size compared to ONS adults age 18+ sample size.

* **UCL Smoking Toolkit Study**

The UCL Smoking Toolkit Study is an academic study of smoking and quitting trends since 2006, based on household surveys of representative samples of approximately 1,700 adults aged 16 and over in England each month. There is some uncertainty about the latest figures. The survey had to switch from face-to-face to telephone interviews due to the pandemic and there has not yet been a full year of data collection in 2021. The new data on smoking quit attempts and quit success rates is available at: <https://smokinginengland.info/graphs/top-line-findings>

* **PHE’s Tobacco Control Profiles for England**

For local smoking prevalence figures and additional local data see:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/tobacco-control/data#page/0>

* **Public Health Matters blog, authored by Professor Jamie Brown and Martin Dockrell**

Data on adult smoking prevalence and cigarettes per day from the Smoking Toolkit Study were used to estimate the total number of cigarettes per year. This method has been found to tally closely with sales data (Comparison of Trends in Self-reported Cigarette Consumption and Sales in England, 2011 to 2018 | Lifestyle Behaviours | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network).

Estimates were derived for each year for the number of cigarettes smoked that year compared to 2011 and aggregated for a cumulative total.

* Almost 40 billion cigarettes were smoked in 2011
* An estimated just 25 billion cigarettes will be smoked this year, almost 15bn fewer than 2011
* The cumulative total reduction comes to over 90 billion fewer cigarettes smoked since 2011
* **Deaths caused by smoking**

Between 2019 and 2020, there were 74,600 deaths attributable to smoking.

ONS mortality statistics: NHS Digital Statistics on Smoking, England 2020 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-smoking/statistics-on-smoking-england-2020>

* **Hospital admissions**

Between 2019 and 2020, 506,100 hospital admissions were attributable to smoking in England.

NHS Digital Hospital Episode Statistics: Statistics on Smoking, England 2020 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-smoking/statistics-on-smoking-england-2020>

* **Tackling health inequalities**

National statistical data shows that those in manual occupations are more than twice as likely to smoke as those in professional and clerical roles. Through *Stoptober*, PHE aims to target these groups in particular to help reduce health inequalities.

Ref: ONS Adult Smoking Habits in the UK: 2019

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2019>

* **Towards a Smokefree Generation: A Tobacco Control Plan for England**

The government’s [Tobacco Control Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-a-smoke-free-generation-tobacco-control-plan-for-england), published in July 2017, sets a series of challenging ambitions:

* Reduce the number of 15-year-olds who regularly smoke from 8% to 3% or less
* Reduce smoking among adults in England from 15.5% to 12% or less
* Reduce the inequality gap in smoking prevalence, between those in routine and manual occupations and the general population
* Reduce the prevalence of smoking in pregnancy from 10.7% to 6% or less
* [**Public Health England**](https://www.gov.uk/phe)

PHE exists to protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.

Website: www.gov.uk/phe Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland

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* **Better Health - Stoptober**

*Stoptober* is the annual campaign under PHE’s umbrella brand, ‘Better Health Let’s Do This’ that encourages smokers across the country to join in and give quitting a go for the month of October. The Better Health campaign aims to encourage millions of adults to kick start their health and reduce their risk of serious illness, including COVID-19.

* **Physical benefits of stopping smoking**

Stopping smoking can significantly improve your health in ways you might not expect. Once you stop smoking, some of the benefits are immediate and some are longer term:[[12]](#footnote-12)[[13]](#footnote-13)[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. After 20 minutes: Pulse rate starts to return to normal.
2. After 8 hours: Oxygen levels are recovering and harmful carbon monoxide in the blood is reduced by half.
3. After 48 hours: The body has flushed out all carbon monoxide, lungs start to clear out mucus and ability to taste and smell is improved.
4. After 72 hours: Bronchial tubes begin to relax, breathing becomes easier and energy levels increase.
5. After 2-12 weeks: Blood is pumping to the heart and muscles better because circulation has improved.
6. After 3-9 months: Coughs, wheezing and breathing problems improve as lung function increases by up to 10%.
7. After 1 year: Risk of heart attack has halved compared to a smoker. And research suggests that people who have quit for a year are happier than those who continue to smoke.
8. After 10 years: Risk of death from lung cancer falls to half that of a smoker.
9. After 15 years: Risk of heart attack falls to the same as someone who has never smoked.
* **Mental health benefits to stopping smoking**

Evidence shows that once people have got past the short-term withdrawal stage of quitting, they have reduced anxiety, depression and stress and increased positive mood compared with people who continue to smoke. For symptoms of anxiety and depression, stopping smoking is as effective as taking antidepressants. Just 6 weeks after quitting, people start feeling happier as well as healthier.

Reference: <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD013522.pub2/full#CD013522-abs-0002>

* **Financial benefits to stopping smoking**

Over the last ten years the cost of tobacco in the UK has increased by 73.9%[[15]](#footnote-15)

The average male smoker in Great Britain smokes 9.2 cigarettes a day and the average female smoker 9 cigarettes a day[[16]](#footnote-16) which works out as 276 cigarettes a month for men and 270 for women (based on 30 days in a month).

For men, that’s £158.15 a month and £1,897.80 a year, and for women that’s £154.71 a month and £1,856.52 a year, that could be saved by giving up smoking

1. ONS Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2019 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2019#:~:text=In%20the%20UK%2C%20in%202019,2018%20to%2014.1%25%20in%202019> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Opinium online survey conducted across a representative sample of 2,000 smokers in England, 20th – 31st August 2021 over 18 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. PHE Monitoring Evaluation Data, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregistrationsummarytables/2020> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ONS mortality statistics: NHS Digital Statistics on Smoking, England 2020 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-smoking/statistics-on-smoking-england-2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UCL Smoking Toolkit Study, 2020 <https://smokinginengland.info/graphs/top-line-findings> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Price in July 2021= £11.46 / Price in July 2011= £6.59 / 11.46-6.59= £4.86 / (4.86/6.6)\*100= 73.6% [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ONS, RPI: Ave price - Cigarettes 20 king size filter, 2021 https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/czmp [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. West & Stapleton, 2008, Clinical and public health significance of treatments to aid smoking cessation, European Respiratory Review, Volume 17, number 210, P201 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Brown, J., Kotz, D., Michie, S., Stapleton, J., Walmsley, M., & West, R. (2014). How effective and cost-effective was the national mass media smoking cessation campaign ‘Stoptober’?. Drug and alcohol dependence, 135, 52-58 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ONS Adult Smoking Habits in the UK: 2019 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [The Health Consequences of Smoking: a report of the Surgeon General](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/DPMsCZr3hPWO7BhzBXyD), 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Within 20 minutes of quitting, [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\_statistics/sgr/2004/posters/20mins/index.htm](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/wr8aC132hnQv6WcGwz9L) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shahab, L, West R, Differences in happiness between smokers, ex-smokers and never smokers: cross-sectional findings from a national household survey Drug Alcohol Depend. 2012 Feb 1;121(1-2):38-44. doi: 10.1016 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. RPI: Ave price - Cigarettes 20 king size filter. Accessed September 2020: [https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/czmp](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/tAqFCgMrTPon1vI3tgUh) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ONS, Adult Smoking habits in the UK, 2019. [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/drugusealcoholandsmoking/datasets/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/NLYZCj6xFlBk4zc14a9I) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)