



Tobacco vending machines – the evidence

The problem with cigarette vending machines

In 2006, more than **1 in 6 children and young people** who were regular smokers usually **bought their cigarettes from vending machines** in England¹. Based on these latest available figures, the British Heart Foundation estimates that in 2006, **more than 46,000 11-15 year old regular smokers accessed their cigarettes through vending machines in England and Wales**². The raising of the age limit for cigarettes from 16 to 18 means there may now be more underage smokers accessing cigarettes from vending machines.



The BHF believes that **access to cigarettes** is a key issue and cigarette vending machines remain an easy source through which young people buy cigarettes – an obvious loophole which undermines other important tobacco control measures. The BHF wants to reduce the number of young people who are putting their health at risk. To help do this, we want to see **an immediate ban on the sale of cigarettes from vending machines**.

Smoking and young people

Smoking is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease (CHD), and smokers are more than twice as likely to have a fatal heart attack than non-smokers. Every year in the UK, 114,000 smokers die as a result of smoking. One in four of these deaths is from cardiovascular disease. Despite a range of tobacco control measures being implemented, smoking rates amongst children remain consistently high and hundreds of children each day continue to take up smoking.³ Young people who smoke are at serious risk of developing life-shortening conditions.⁴ People who begin smoking at a young age are more likely to suffer tobacco-related mortality and morbidity, and succumb to tobacco-related diseases earlier.⁵

Smoking and children: general facts

- **Over 10 million adults in the UK are smokers**⁶
- **Smoking-related illnesses are responsible for the deaths of around 114,000 people every year**⁷
- **66% of adult smokers started when they were under age**⁸
- **Nearly 40% of adults who are smokers or ex-smokers started smoking before they were 16**⁹
- **6% of children aged 11-15 are regular smokers**¹⁰
- **The proportion of regular young smokers increases sharply with age: 1% of 11 year olds smoke regularly compared with 15% of 15-year olds**¹¹

Regulations state that tobacco vending machines should display health warnings and there are guidelines from the National Association of Cigarette Machine Operators (NACMO) to ensure that machines are placed in the sight of the person responsible for the premises, or an employee. Legislation also states that it is an offence to allow tobacco to be purchased by children and teenagers from vending machines which can be found a range of venues including bowling alleys, community centres and pubs.

Nevertheless, children can and do buy cigarettes through vending machines. The issue was recognised by the Government in the 1998 *Smoking Kills* White Paper, which cited statistics from an Office of National Statistics survey in which 1 in 3 school children who smoked said that machines were one of their usual sources of cigarettes¹².

Ten years on, this remains a serious problem. A survey by LACORS¹³ reporting on test purchases by young people under the supervision of trading standards officers showed that there was an almost two-fold increase in illegal sales of tobacco to minors in the six months from October 2007 to March 2008 compared with the same period in 2006/7.

The study found that **young people were able to buy cigarettes from coin-operated vending machines on more than four in ten occasions**, with a number of councils reporting a 100% successful purchase rate. Purchasing cigarettes from vending machines was the **most successful** way for young people to get hold of cigarettes. It was almost twice as successful compared to other ways tested such as purchasing cigarettes from a newsagent, off licence or petrol station kiosk.

In an exercise carried out by Solihull Council and Solihull NHS Care Trust in September 2008, a 16 year old was able to buy 100 cigarettes from five different cigarette vending machines in Knowle and Solihull town centre without being challenged. The council wanted to test how easy it is for children and teenagers to buy cigarettes from vending machines and is now investigating the premises involved.¹⁴

In Bournemouth, trading standards officers carried out a similar under-cover operation and discovered that a 15 year old was able to buy cigarettes from seven out of eight vending machines without being challenged. In one case, the owner even helped the boy find change.¹⁵

Survey figures also suggest that vending machines are disproportionately used by children, perhaps because of the ease of purchase by underage smokers. Whereas in 2006, 1 in 6 children who regularly smoked reported they regularly bought cigarettes through vending machines, **an ASH survey from 2008 revealed that only one in 20 adult regular smokers used these machines, and even then their use was occasional rather than regular.**¹⁶

It is clear that it is far more difficult for publicans or premises holders to enforce statutory age limits for cigarette vending machines than it is for retailers to ask for proof of age in a face-to-face transaction. **An unmanned machine cannot be properly policed, wherever it is situated.** In crowded bars, clubs and pubs it is not realistic for members of staff to constantly keep an eye on a cigarette vending machine at all times. **A ban on cigarette vending machines would cut off one of the major sources of cigarettes for children and create a further barrier to smoking for under-age young people.** Further, a full ban is in line with the **WHO Framework on Tobacco Control** and is the only fail-safe way to stop children accessing cigarettes via vending machines.

Consistency of approach for age-limited products

The age limit for tobacco sales is 18 years. The rise in 2007 brought tobacco in line with a number of other restricted goods available at retail in order to deliver a consistent message on health and safety. The following activities have an 18 year age limit:

- Purchase of alcohol
- Purchase of fireworks
- Purchase of solvents

- Purchase of cigarette lighter refills
- Purchase of crossbows
- Purchase of knives

The products listed above can only be purchased in a face-to-face transaction over the counter. It is up to the retailer to ask for identification and proof of age if they believe the person is under-age. It is inconceivable to imagine a situation where alcohol, fireworks or knives could be available through a vending machine. There is therefore no reason for tobacco products to continue to be accessed in this manner and it is an anomaly which must be tackled.

European and International experience

There are currently 22 countries in Europe who ban or have never allowed sales from cigarette vending machines¹⁷. A ban of cigarette vending machines in the UK would bring the country in line with many European nations.

Some countries have introduced modified, 'child-proof' cigarette vending machines in an attempt to prevent underage sales, by requiring the use of tokens or ID cards. For example, in Japan age verification cards have been issued to tackle underage sale of cigarettes, but the evidence shows that underage smokers manage to circumvent the system by borrowing age verification cards from friends, family or falsifying cards with photos of older people¹⁸.

In January 2006, Spain introduced a range of tobacco control measures including restricting the access of underage persons to cigarettes from vending machines.¹⁹ Anecdotal evidence suggests that some bars and clubs have chosen to restrict underage sale of cigarettes from a vending machine by introducing remote controlled vending machines.

In January 2007, Germany started to modify cigarette vending machines to prevent underage sales. From 1 January 2009, every vending machine in Germany will be modified with electronic age verification. The tobacco purchaser's ATM card (modified with an electronic chip) or EU drivers' license electronically 'awakens' the vending machine and cigarettes can be purchased. As these are recent measures, there is no evaluation yet available to demonstrate if they are successfully stopping underage cigarette sale.

However, in June 2008 an expert advisory body²⁰ to the German government called for a full ban of cigarette vending machines in its latest tobacco control strategy recommendations²¹. The body believes that the current measures don't go far enough as cigarette vending machines remain the most important source of cigarettes for children.

Anecdotal evidence from New Zealand suggests that the infrared system seems to successfully prevent underage sale of cigarettes. However, there are fewer pubs in New Zealand than in the UK and therefore fewer cigarette vending machines.

Doubts over ID Checks

Age-verification systems, including those using staff-operated infrared remote-controls, tokens or ID cards will be less effective in restricting access to children through vending machines than by removing them completely. Busy staff in a bar may forget to ask for ID.

According to Home Office figures, 22% of 10-17 year olds who had drunk alcohol obtained it from bars and pubs in 2004.²² ID-checks are still not being carried out stringently enough for alcohol sales. 34 per cent of on-trade venues failed to check for ID from young people during test alcohol purchases in July 2008.²³ If a significant number of under-18s are still able to obtain alcohol from pubs and bars, is it highly questionable that an ID-based age-verification system will be sufficiently fool-proof in stopping under-age tobacco sales from vending machines.

BHF's urgent call to ban cigarette vending machines

The BHF is calling for legislation to ban cigarette vending machines and prevent children from easily accessing cigarettes. The BHF welcomes the inclusion of ban on cigarette vending

machines in the Scottish Health Bill²⁴ and calls on Westminster MPs and peers, who are debating this issue during the Health Bill, to follow Scotland's lead. The ban must be comprehensive throughout the UK, otherwise health inequalities between the nations will be exacerbated.

References

- ¹Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England, Survey 2006, Table 2.23, Page 47
- ²This is a BHF calculation using the latest available data regarding vending machines from *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England 2006* and mid-2006 population estimates by individual year for Wales. It is assumed that trends in smoking amongst young people and children are similar in England and Wales.
- ³Statistics taken from Action on Smoking and Health, [Facts at a Glance](#), October 2008
- ⁴Doll R, Peto R, Boreham J & Sutherland I (2004) Mortality in relation to smoking: 50 years' observations on male British doctors. *British Medical Journal* 328(7455):1-10
- ⁵Doll R, Peto R, Boreham J & Sutherland I (2004) Mortality in relation to smoking: 50 years' observations on male British doctors. *British Medical Journal* 328(7455):1-10
- ⁶Statistics taken from Action on Smoking and Health, [Facts at a Glance](#), October 2008
- ⁷Statistics taken from Action on Smoking and Health, [Facts at a Glance](#), October 2008
- ⁸Statistics on Smoking, England October 2008 (NHS statistics, The Information Centre, DH), Page 8
- ⁹Statistics on Smoking, England October 2008 (NHS statistics, The Information Centre, DH), Page 8
- ¹⁰Statistics on Smoking, England October 2008 (NHS statistics, The Information Centre, DH), Page 29
- ¹¹Statistics on Smoking, England October 2008 (NHS statistics, The Information Centre, DH), Page 29
- ¹²Lindsey Jarvis, Office for National Statistics. *Smoking among secondary school children in 1996*: England. London: The Stationery Office, 1997
- ¹³Test Purchasing of Tobacco Products, Results from Local Authority Trading Standards, 1st October 2007 to 31st March 2008: www.lacors.gov.uk. LACORS is the organisation responsible for overseeing local authority regulatory services in the UK.
- ¹⁴Press release by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council released on 3 September: <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/news/17022.htm> (accessed on 27 October 2008)
- ¹⁵Cigarette machines are uncontrolled say Bournemouth's Trading Standards, 22 December 2008
http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/News/press_office/Press_Releases/December2008/Uncontrolled_Cig_Machines.asp
- ¹⁶ASH survey conducted in Spring 2008 with 822 smokers
- ¹⁷The European Tobacco Control report, WHO 2007. Page 69 <http://www.euro.who.int/document/e89842.pdf> (accessed 7 Nov 08)
- ¹⁸See article on <http://www.pinktentacle.com/2008/06/magazine-photos-fool-age-verification-cameras/> (accessed 7 Nov 08)
- ¹⁹Article 4 in LEY 28/2005, de 26 de diciembre, de medidas sanitarias frente al tabaquismo y reguladora de la venta, el suministro, el consumo y la publicidad de los productos del tabaco.
- ²⁰Drogen- und Suchtrat (Drug and Addiction Advisory Panel)
- ²¹[Empfehlungen des Drogen- und Suchtrates an die Drogenbeauftragte der Bundesregierung für ein nationales Aktionsprogramm zur Tabakprävention](#) (Recommendations to the German Government on tobacco control), page 12
- ²²Underage drinking: findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/06/r277.pdf>
- ²³8 Serve Legal – quoted in the Morning Advertiser, 4th September 2008. Serve Legal is an independent test purchase service for retailers of age restricted products across the UK to check staff are checking young people for ID. These tests were carried out in 1500 off-trade and on-trade venues across the UK. <http://servelegal.co.uk/press.html>
- ²⁴Published on 26th February 2009