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Norwegian Government to consult on proposal for standardised packaging of tobacco products

The Government proposal means that all tobacco products sold in Norway will have standardised packaging. The goal is to prevent tobacco use among children and young people.

– We know that young people are influenced by the appearance of tobacco packaging. Packaging may be what makes them try tobacco for the first time, or what deters them from it. No one wants young people to use tobacco, and it's time to stop the marketing of tobacco products to young people, says Minister of Health and Care Services in Norway Bent Høie.

Smoking remains one of our most significant public health challenges. Every year, about 6600 people in Norway die from diseases caused by smoking. Snus (smokeless tobacco) is also harmful to health and can cause cancer, type 2 diabetes and increased mortality connected to a number of diseases. Snus use during pregnancy increases the risk of premature birth and stillbirth.

Smoking among young people has declined over the past decade, and five percent of 16-24 year olds smoke. We have however seen a sharp increase among young people who use snus in the last decade. One third and just under every fourth young woman use snus. 18 percent of 16-24 year olds use snus daily. Among boys, 23 per cent use snus every day. 12 percent of girls do the same.

– The large increase in snus use among youth started after the snus industry began developing products that appeal to young people, including snus boxes with new designs, new colors and flavorings such as vanilla, menthol and licorice. My goal is to prevent children and young

people from using tobacco, says Høie.

The Ministry of Health and Care Services will publish a consultation on the proposal to standardise all tobacco packaging and tobacco products at the end of February 2015.

The proposal would standardise all tobacco packaging by specifying mandatory colors (dark/dull green) as well as specifications concerning other package design elements. In addition specified text such as brand and variant name must be standardized, including the color, font, size and location on the package. The manufacturer's logo and other design elements, such as color, signs or symbols will not be allowed either on the packaging or on the products.

The European Tobacco Products Directive, which comes into force in May 2016, will include implementation of further tobacco control measures. These include larger combined picture and text health warnings to cover 65 % of the front and the back of packages of tobacco products for smoking and larger text health warnings for snus and other smokeless tobacco products.

Standardised tobacco packaging was introduced in Australia in 2012. It is proposed in England, Ireland and New Zealand and is being considered in Finland and France.