

The New York Times
By Ephrat LIVNI | April 21, 2026

Proposed Lifetime Smoking Ban to Become Law in Britain

Britain aims to raise a “smoke-free generation” by permanently banning the sale or supply of tobacco to anyone born in 2009 or after, with a bill that was approved by Parliament on Tuesday. The bill applies to people currently 17 years old or younger and aims to keep them from ever picking up the habit in their lifetime. The proposal is expected to soon go into law after the final formality of approval by King Charles III.

Lawmakers say that in practice, the measure means the age of sale for tobacco products will rise over time as the targeted demographic group grows older and could lead to a smoke-free society. The law will apply in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The people covered by the law will be “part of the first smoke-free generation, protected from a lifetime of addiction and harm,” said Wes Streeting, the health secretary, on Tuesday. “Prevention is better than cure.”

The legislation includes new licensing and registration requirements for retailers and adds product information mandates, advertising and promotion controls, and further restrictions on smoking and vaping in public places, as well as allowing additional restrictions on vaping products. It hopes to block the use of tobacco products, describing them as “the main underlying drivers of ill-health,” and to reduce the pressure on Britain’s publicly funded health care system from smoking-related illnesses.

The bill, first proposed in 2024, is among the few generational smoking bans to have gained traction worldwide. Last year, a law banning tobacco for anyone born in 2007 or later went into effect in the Maldives. New Zealand enacted the world’s first generational smoking ban in 2022. It

was lauded by public health officials and criticized by retailers and the tobacco industry, and was abolished the next year under a new government.

The fate of New Zealand’s legislation, which some of its proponents say was killed as a result of the influence of the tobacco industry, may signal similar struggles ahead for Britain’s smoking cessation efforts.

In 2024, Britain’s Office for National Statistics reported that 5.3 million people aged 18 or over were smokers, accounting for more than 10 percent of adults in the United Kingdom.

Smoking is responsible for 64,000 deaths every year in Britain, making it the leading preventable cause of death, disability and ill health in the country, according to the Department of Health and Social Care.

In total, smoking costs Britain nearly \$29 billion annually, including through lost productivity and health care costs, according to the government. Smoking also has socioeconomic effects and exacerbates health inequalities, the health department said, noting that 500,000 households are “living in poverty” because of tobacco expenditures.

A 2024 report on adult smoking habits in Britain by the Office for National Statistics showed that three-quarters of smokers wished they had never started smoking and the majority wanted to quit. Citing those statistics, the health department, in an assessment of the generational ban bill, said, “Addiction is not a choice.”