

The cigarette industry should be destroyed for the benefit of public health, Prof. Sir Chris Whitty, the Government's chief medical adviser, has said.

Sir Chris, who is also chief medical officer for England, warned that smokers faced an appalling death, and said ministers are currently considering whether to bring in new policies to limit smoking.

An independent review, which was published in June, recommended that the Government enact measures to ensure England is smoke-free by 2030, which could include stronger taxation, and limiting further where people can light up.

However, the Government has not yet said which recommendations it will follow.

Speaking at a symposium on medical ethics held by the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine, Sir Chris said: "Smoking is the biggest driver that we could easily deal with in the sense of the inequalities we see across the UK. It is an appalling way to die – it kills people in multiple ways. Everybody in this room would agree that getting smoking down to zero and destroying the cigarette industry should be an aim in public health."

He added that it was important for the state to intervene in industries that were based on addiction: "Where the current government has decided to go into these markets has not yet been decided, and that's going to be up to the ministers who are currently in post."

In 2019, the Government set an objective for England to be smoke-free by 2030, meaning only 5 per cent of the population would smoke by then. However, according to the review published in June, without further action, England will miss the smoke-free 2030 target by at least seven years, and the poorest areas will not meet it until 2044.

The review's recommendations include raising the legal age of smoking each year until nobody can buy tobacco, and banning smoking in many public areas, such as outside of hospitals and in the majority of new social housing.

At a business debate of the Government's smoke-free policy, a Tory MP said that making smoking obsolete was "vital" to the health of the entire population. He added: "It also helps deliver economic growth because smoking increases sickness, absenteeism, and disability and the total public finance cost of smoking is twice the taxes tobacco brings into the Exchequer. Many tens of thousands of people die prematurely each year from smoking, and 30 times as many as those who die are suffering from serious illnesses, which cost the NHS billions of pounds every year".

He said he was deeply concerned that the Government had still not published its new smoking plan after the review.

Adapted from *The Daily Telegraph*, November 2022

Question 1 : According to the article, why should the cigarette industry be destroyed? Answer the question in your own words. (80 words ± 10 %)

Cigarettes are a major health issue: they cause thousands of people to die every year, and they make hundreds of thousands ill, which has a significant impact on the budget of the health system, and on the economy, as people need to take time off work, or become less productive because of tobacco.

Moreover, smoking disproportionately affects the poorest, most vulnerable communities, so eliminating this industry would contribute to making society less unequal, which explains why it is a relatively consensual measure, according to experts. (85 words)

Question 2 : In your opinion, how far should the state intervene to change health-related behaviours? Answer the question in your own words. (180 words ± 10 %)

During Covid, governments imposed drastic measures limiting freedom to preserve public health. But when it comes to everyday behaviours, how justified is state intervention?

Of course, people should be free to make their own choices regarding their health: "my body, my choice" is a slogan that can be applied to other issues than abortion rights... However there has to be some limit to such liberty, especially in countries with a welfare state, if the system is to function for the benefit of everyone.

Indeed, individual choice almost always has an impact on society as a whole: an alcoholic's untimely death will have an impact on their family, who might lose their only financial support, and need to rely on social benefits which are paid for by everyone's taxes... Since the devastating consequences of Prohibition in the USA and the rise of illegal trafficking and gang violence, it has been obvious that banning commonly consumed harmful substances is not a perfect solution, but states can still act efficiently through taxation, along with awareness and rehabilitation programmes to drastically curb their consumption.

States should not shy away from intervening heavy-handedly to change people's health-related behaviours. (195 words)

Alexandre Feltz est un pionnier. Son message ? « Les malades et les personnes fragilisées ont un médicament à portée de main ». C'est sur ce postulat, validé par des études scientifiques, qu'il a mis en place, depuis 2012, le sport sur ordonnance. Un dispositif désormais inscrit dans la loi française depuis janvier 2016 : les médecins peuvent prescrire de l'activité physique à leurs patients souffrant d'une affection de longue durée, soit près de 11 millions de Français. Dans le livre qu'il vient de publier, le généraliste cite plusieurs exemples, tel Pierre, diabétique, qui voit sa glycémie s'équilibrer et même baisser après avoir monté les escaliers ou fait du vélo d'appartement. Pour lui, en France, « on va dans le mur ». Seulement 25 % de la population pratique une activité physique conforme aux recommandations de l'OMS (au moins trente minutes par jour, cinq jours sur sept). Pis, 87 % des adolescents de 11 à 17 ans n'exercent pas une activité suffisamment bonne pour la santé.

Alexandre Feltz is a pioneer. (2) Here's his message: "sick and frail/fragile people have a medicine at their fingertips/well within reach/can treat themselves easily/have easy access to a medicine". (3) It is based on this premise/idea, which has been validated /confirmed by scientific studies, that he has set up, since 2012, sports on prescription/prescriptions of sports/exercise prescriptions. (5) The scheme has now been enshrined in/set into French law since January 2016: doctors can prescribe physical activity/exercise for their patients who suffer from a long-term condition, i.e. almost 11 million French people. (6) In the book he has just published, the general practitioner cites/gives several examples, such as Pierre, a diabetic, who sees / Pierre, who is diabetic and sees his blood sugar levels stabilize and even drop after climbing stairs or riding an exercise bike. (6) For him, in France, "we are heading straight for a disaster"/"we are heading for a fall" (2) Only 25% of the population engage in physical activity that is in line with WHO recommendations (at least thirty minutes a day, five days a week). (5) Worse still, 87% of teenagers aged 11 to 17 do not engage in sufficiently healthy physical activity. (3)