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New Zealand

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New Zealand passes world-first tobacco law to ban smoking for next generation

Q The country is believed to be the first to implement an annually rising legal smoking age

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New Zealand has introduced a steadily rising smoking age to stop those aged 14 and under from ever being able to legally buy cigarettes in world-first legislation to **outlaw smoking for the next generation**.

Associate health minister Ayesha Verrall said at the law's passing on Tuesday: "Thousands of people will live longer, healthier lives and the health system will be \$5bn better off from not needing to treat the illnesses caused by smoking, such as numerous types of cancer, heart attacks, strokes, amputations."

New Zealand is believed to be the first country in the world to implement the annually rising smoking age, ensuring tobacco

cannot be sold to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009.

P It will be accompanied by a slew of other measures to make smoking less affordable and accessible, including dramatically reducing the legal amount of nicotine in tobacco products and forcing them to be sold only through specialty tobacco stores, rather than corner stores and supermarkets.

The country has also increased funding for health services and campaigns, and rolled out quitting services specifically for Māori and Pacific communities.

The number of stores legally allowed to sell cigarettes will be reduced to a tenth of their existing levels - from 6,000 to just 600 nationwide. The laws passed their final reading on Tuesday evening, and will come into force in 2023, as New Zealand attempts to reach its goal of making the country “smoke-free” by 2025.

While introducing the law for its first reading in July, Verrall said: “For decades we have permitted tobacco companies to maintain their market share by making their deadly product more and more addictive. It is disgusting and it is bizarre. We have more regulations in this country on the safety of the sale of a sandwich than on a cigarette.

“We want to make sure young people never start smoking so we will make it an offence to sell or supply smoked tobacco products to new cohorts of youth. People aged 14 when the law comes into effect will never be able to legally purchase tobacco.”

“Smoking rates are plummeting,” she added. “Our goal of being smoke-free by 2025 is within reach.”

The new laws, however, will not restrict vape sales. Data indicates that at least some New Zealanders have swapped their nicotine habit from cigarettes to vapes.

Data released in November showed the number of people smoking daily had fallen to 8% - down from 9.4% last year - marking the lowest rates since records began.

The rise in daily vape users, however, was larger than the drop in daily smokers: 8.3% of adults are now vaping daily, up from 6.2% in the past year.