



31 May 2025
Joint Statement

World No Tobacco Day 2025: protect youth with stringent laws on tobacco and nicotine products

On World No Tobacco Day 2025, the European Lung Health Group supports the World Health Organisation (WHO) call to protect children and young adults from the harmful strategies of the tobacco industry¹. We call for urgent EU-level action to shield youth from the growing dangers of tobacco and nicotine products.

Tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death in the EU, causing around 500,000 premature deaths annually. Yet the threat is evolving. While traditional smoking is stagnating, **novel nicotine-based products** such as e-cigarettes, heated tobacco, and nicotine pouches are rapidly rising in popularity, especially among **teenagers and young adults**.

These products are far from harmless. Nicotine is a highly addictive substance that affects brain development and increases the risk of long-term addiction when exposure occurs in adolescence². These products also contain toxic chemicals considered carcinogens, found in traditional tobacco. According to **WHO/Europe's 2024 data, over 30% of 15-year-olds in the region have used e-cigarettes**³. The **health risks** are real, including links **to lung injury, asthma, and other respiratory diseases**.

The European Lung Health Group stands firmly behind the objective of reaching a **smoke-free generation by 2040**, as we continue campaigning for **stringent EU-level tobacco and nicotine regulations** to reduce preventable deaths⁴. Decisive legislation for tobacco and vaping cannot wait any longer. It is time for the European Commission to act and protect the generation most at risk of addiction to tobacco and nicotine: the **young people in Europe**.

The industry's tactics are clear: exploiting regulatory gaps to appeal to youth through candy-like flavours and scents, attractive packaging and product design, affordability, and targeted marketing via digital platforms. **The goal? To normalise vaping among European youth, often serving as a gateway to smoking**. Research shows that adolescents are easier to become addicted, as their brain is still under development and more susceptible to nicotine's rewarding effects. Without strong regulation, these products continue to trap new generations in cycles of addiction.

In a strong signal, in March, **12 EU Health Ministers**, led by the Netherlands, have urged the EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Olivér Várhelyi to step up the EU's efforts against tobacco and nicotine products⁵. In May, **15 EU Finance Ministers** echoed the request, pressing for updated taxation rules to include emerging products like heated tobacco and e-cigarettes⁶.





This is why the ELHG urges the European Commission to:

- **Revise the Tobacco Products Directive**, and ensure it fully covers all nicotine-based products;
- **Ban flavourings** and introduce **mandatory plain packaging** to reduce the appeal to youth;
- **Overhaul the Tobacco Advertising Directive**, particularly closing existing loopholes, enabling enforcement and addressing online and social media promotion;
- **Strengthen smoke-free environments**, including for novel products, to protect non-smokers and de-normalise use. The recently updated Council recommendation should be accompanied by European Commission active support to Member States for its implementation;
- **Update tobacco taxation rules**, ensuring new products are taxed in line with conventional tobacco;
- Encourage and support Member States to adopt tobacco endgame policies, such as generational sales bans, to protect future generations⁷.

The time to act is now. Let's break the policy inertia and protect Europe's youth from a lifetime of addiction and disease. It's time to support Europeans to #KeepBreathing.

ENDNOTES

¹ World No Tobacco Day is marked every 31st of May by the World Health Organisation:

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-no-tobacco-day/2025>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2024). Why Youth Vape. Retrieved from

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/why-youth-vape.html>

³ WHO Regional Office for Europe, A focus on adolescent substance use in Europe, central Asia and Canada, 2024 <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/376573/9789289060936-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

⁴ European Lung Health Group, "A vision for EU action on lung health 2024-2029", 2024:

https://breathevision.eu/images/A_vision_for_EU_action_on_lung_health_2024-2029_-_KeepBreathing_publication.pdf

⁵ 'Health ministers urge the European Commission to boost anti-tobacco action', Efanet.org, March 2025

<https://efanet.org/news/news/4441-12-eu-member-states-demand-immediate-action-on-tobacco-legislation-delays>

⁶ Commission looks to revise tax on tobacco and alternatives', Euractiv, May 2025

<https://news.bloombergtax.com/daily-tax-report-international/fifteen-countries-urge-eu-to-update-tobacco-tax-rules>

⁷ European Respiratory Society, 2024. Adoption of tobacco endgame policies in the EU: Can Member States introduce a generational sales ban?

About the European Lung Health Group: The European Lung Health Group brings together nine organizations dedicated to improving lung health in Europe, including: Alpha-1 Europe Alliance, Cystic Fibrosis Europe (CF-E), European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA), European Lung Foundation (ELF), European Pulmonary Fibrosis Federation (EU-PFF), European Respiratory Society (ERS), Lung Cancer Europe (LuCE), Pulmonary Hypertension Association Europe (PHA-E), Tuberculosis Coalition Europe (TBEC)



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breathevision@efanet.org



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