

LESSON PLAN

Tobacco Labels

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grades 6 to 9

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: This lesson has been adapted from Smoke-Free for Life, a smoking prevention curriculum supplement from the Nova Scotia Department of Health, Drug Dependency and Tobacco Control Unit.

Overview

In this lesson, students debate the effectiveness of health warning labels on tobacco products. They begin by looking at different warning labels from around the world, and then focus specifically on Canada's new visual warning labels. Students discuss the elements of effective warning labels, and look at the difficulties of reaching young people with health messages.

Learning Outcomes

Big ideas/key concepts: Students will learn the understand that...

- Media have social and political implications: Media works can influence how we behave; governments sometimes regulate media for the public good
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form: Warning labels on tobacco products follow a prescribed form
- Audiences negotiate meaning: Different people respond differently to the same media text (e.g. warnings)

Key questions:

- How can media works change how we behave? How do different techniques or approaches work to make people less likely to do something? How do these vary for different groups of people?
- When is it acceptable for the government to require warning labels on products?

Essential knowledge: Students will learn...

- Reading media: How labels, text and images are used to influence behaviour
- Media health: How media influence decisions relating to dangerous behaviours, such as tobacco use

Performance tasks: Students will be able to use media tools to create a warning label that shows their *understanding* of the medium, and *engage* with the question of when warning labels are justified

Preparation and Materials

- *Photocopy student handouts:*
- *Anatomy of a Cigarette Package*
- *Canadian Tobacco Warning Labels*

Procedure

ANATOMY OF A CIGARETTE PACKAGE

Project or distribute *Anatomy of a Cigarette Package* and explain that every package of cigarettes in Canada must look like this: each individual pack may have different health messages and warnings but they all have to follow this format.

Ask students:

- Why do some products have warning labels? What is the purpose of them?
- Why do they think cigarettes need warning labels? (Make sure the following points come up: they are bad for your health; they are addictive, so once you start smoking it can be very hard to stop; and second-hand smoke can hurt people around you.)
- Go through the different elements of the warning with students. Why do they think the people who designed the warnings included each one?
 - Graphic health warning—Why is this the biggest part of the label? Why include images and not just a text warning?
 - Health information messages—How is this visually different from the health warning? Why do students think it might have been included?
 - Toxicity information—Why might this more technical information, about the effects of the different ingredients in the cigarette be smaller?

- Individual cigarette health warning—Why might the designers have decided to include a warning on each specific cigarette as well as on the package? (Prompt them to think about the different ways that a cigarette might come into someone's hand—especially a young person's.)
- Ask students to think about famous logos. Tell them to close their eyes and see if they can visualize:
 - The Apple logo
 - The Nike logo
 - The McDonald's logo
- Why do they think there is not space on the package for brand logos, only the name of the brand in plain type?

TOBACCO WARNING LABELS

Now project or distribute the *Canadian Tobacco Warning Labels* handout to students. Ask students:

- How do these labels get your attention?
- Can you tell, even before you read the text, that using this product is risky or dangerous? How?
- In what different ways do they get across the *specific* risks of using the product?
- Which do you think is likely to be more effective, the warnings that focus on giving information (like “cigarettes cause stomach cancer” and “cigarettes are the leading cause of COPD”) or ones that rely on striking images (like “cigarettes can damage your heart” and “cigarettes cause gum disease”? Why?)
- Do they think warnings that focus on warning people about their own health more effective, or ones that warn about the harm they could do to other people (like “second hand smoke kills” and cigarette smoke harms babies”? Why?)
- Do you think that these warnings are aimed more at young people or at adults? Why? (Encourage students to think about the images, the text and the colours.)
- Do you think these warnings are more effective in preventing people from starting to smoke, or helping them quit? Why?

- Do you think warnings like these could ever backfire, and make some people more likely to smoke?
 - If so, why?
 - Who would be more likely to be affected that way?
 - What might you do to prevent this?

OTHER WARNING LABELS

Remind students of your discussion of *why* cigarettes have warning labels. Distribute the handout *Should alcohol carry a warning label?* and either have students read it or read through it with the class.

Now ask students:

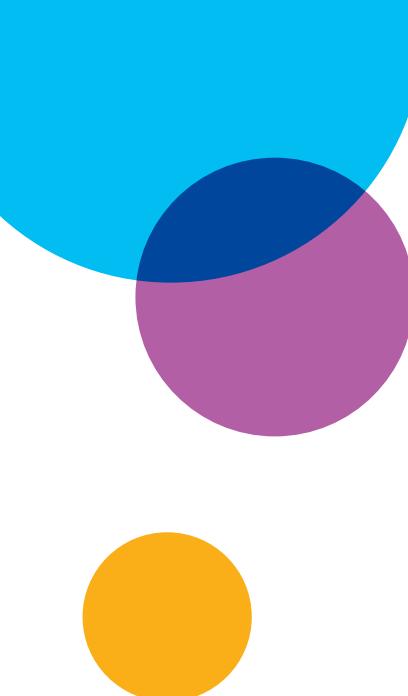
- Based on what you've read, how are alcohol and tobacco similar and different?
- Do they think alcohol products should have warning labels?
- What more information would you need to decide that? (For instance, how severe are the health risks of alcohol compared to tobacco?)
- If alcohol products had warning labels, what should they look like? How much of the packaging should they cover? Who should they be aimed at? Should they be allowed to use logos or other branding?
- Vaping products currently only need to have one of two health warnings, "Vaping products contain nicotine, a highly addictive chemical" and "Vaping products release chemicals that may harm your health." Should they have warning labels more like those on cigarette packages? Why or why not? Who should they be aimed at? Should they be allowed to use logos or other branding?

Using a chalkboard, whiteboard, chart paper or a simple graphic program, have the class work together to design a warning label that could be used either on alcohol or vaping products.

ASSESSMENT: TO LABEL OR NOT TO LABEL?

Have students suggest a list of other products that might be given warning labels. They should be things where normal use could be risky in some way. Here are some suggestions:

- Phones
- Junk food

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- Social networks
 - Skateboards
 - Video games
 - Power tools
 - Cars or motorcycles

Either individually or in groups, have students pick one of these and decide whether or not they should have a warning label. (With older students, you may wish to add a research stage where they identify what the known and possible risks are.) Students should then write an explanation (one or two paragraphs) for why or why not the product should have a warning label.

Whatever their answer to the above question, they should also create a mock warning label design for the product that follows the guidelines for warning labels discussed earlier. They should also write a short explanation of their label design that explains:

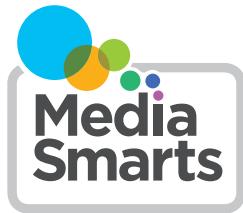
- What audience it was aimed at, and how they appealed to that audience (think about images, colour, text, font, etc.)
- How they chose the information to include and emphasize
- Whether the product should be allowed to use logos or other branding, and why or why not

TOBACCO LABELS

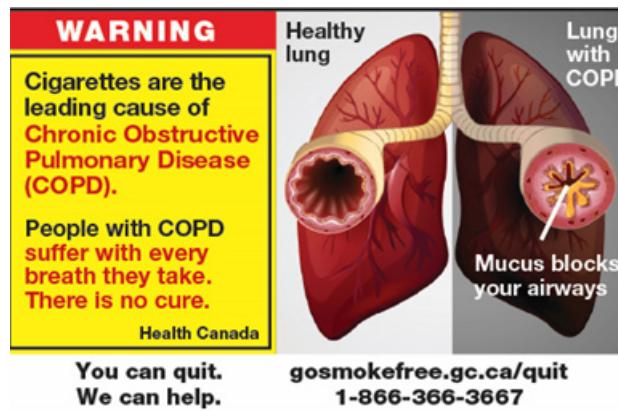
Anatomy of a Cigarette Package



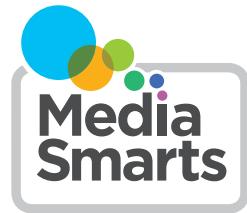
TOBACCO LABELS



Canadian Tobacco Warning Labels



TOBACCO LABELS



Should Alcohol Carry a Warning Label?

Lauren Vogel

Canadian Medical Association Journal

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) is calling on Health Canada, which funded the guidelines, to require warning labels on all alcoholic beverages.

CHANGING CONSENSUS

The scientific consensus on the health impacts of alcohol has changed in the past decade, with studies showing that even small quantities can be harmful.

According to CCSA's review of more than 5000 studies, three to six standard drinks per week pose a moderate health risk, including an increased risk of cancer, while seven or more drinks pose increasingly higher risks, including for heart disease and stroke.

The lifetime risks associated with more than two drinks per week also increase more steeply for women than men due to a host of biological differences.

LOW AWARENESS OF ALCOHOL RISKS

Many people in Canada are unaware of these risks, according to CCSA. More than half of people over age 15 consume more than two drinks per week. Two in five are not aware alcohol is carcinogenic. And the notion that drinking in moderation protects the heart is still widely publicized, despite systematic reviews debunking the claim.

CCSA and the Canadian Cancer Society argue the federal government should require warning labels on alcohol packaging to inform people about the cancer risk and how many standard drinks are in every container.

Consumers "have a right to clear and accessible information about the health and safety of the

products they buy," according to CCSA.

DO ALCOHOL WARNING LABELS WORK?

In one of the only real-world experiments of cancer warnings on alcoholic beverages, labels on products in Yukon liquor stores were found to decrease per capita alcohol sales by more than 6% compared to control sites.

"What we learned from that study was that the cancer labels grabbed consumer attention," study coauthor Erin Hobin told CBC News. "They read the cancer warning very closely. They thought about that message. They talked to their neighbours and friends about that message."

However, the study was cut short, likely owing to alcohol industry pressure.

Industry representatives have also questioned CCSA's methodology and called for an independent review of the updated guidelines.

According to CJ Hélie of Beer Canada, the alcohol industry already voluntarily informs people to drink responsibly, so there's no need for any labels.

For example, Wine Growers of Canada is developing a QR code that manufacturers could use voluntarily to direct consumers to information about responsible drinking.

DUTY TO INFORM

Some experts argue that such initiatives don't go far enough to fulfill the industry's legal duty to inform consumers clearly about health risks, especially if those risks are not well known.

Health warnings "are not just critical, they are required under the law," and a manufacturer's obligation to inform is greater when a product is ingested, according to Jacob Shelley, co-director of the health ethics, law and policy lab at Western University.

In the case of tobacco, warning labels have been effective in attracting consumers' attention and increasing health knowledge, but their impact on behaviour can wear off over time and varies depending on the size and design of the warning.

Health Canada appears reluctant to weigh in on the issue. Although the agency acknowledged to the media that alcohol presents serious and complex public health and safety issues, it has declined to comment on requiring warning labels.

QUESTIONS

What reasons are given in the article for why alcoholic products should have a warning label? List at least three.

1)

2)

3)

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