

Snuffing out the smoking ban

By Georgina Pattinson
BBC News

Smoking in pubs will soon be stubbed out by law but tobacco addicts looking for a nicotine rush have another option... although it's not a pretty one.

Nicotine, as any smoker will tell you, is not the kind of substance to release its hold just because the government has decreed it unacceptable.

The smoking ban in pubs, which comes into force in England and Northern Ireland next year, and already exists in Scotland, may help demonise cigarettes but serious smokers will look elsewhere for their nicotine fix.

Some will venture outside for a sneaky puff between pints, but others might see salvation in snuff - a finely ground tobacco that goes up the nose.

Once the preserve of the foppish aristocrat, snuff is experiencing a small resurgence in popularity.

Sales at Wilsons & Co (Sharrow) Ltd have grown by 10% over the past two years, says Jeremy Archdale, one of descendants of the original family, who started the Sheffield-based company in 1737.

" We've been recently seeing more and more younger people coming in and giving it a try "

Paul Waters, landlord

"It's amazing how many younger people are looking at snuff and it's happening in other countries. We had some visitors from Switzerland 10 days ago, who said the average age of snuff users there is 24," says Mr Archdale.

He doesn't think health concerns are driving snuff's mini-revival - it actually delivers far more of a nicotine hit than cigarettes - rather, a resurgence of interest in the stuff itself.

Ironically, given government efforts to stamp out smoking in public places, snuff even appears to have the official seal of approval.

Snuff is provided, for members and officers of the House of Commons, at the doorkeepers' box at the entrance to the Chamber - a tradition going back to the 18th Century. How many MPs actually endorse it is, of course, another matter.

" Smokers who are considering using smokeless products like snuff as an alternative to cigarettes when the smoking ban comes into force will still be putting their health at serious risk "

Jean King, Cancer Research UK

But at one pub the snuff craze has been going for decades. Drinkers at the Star Inn in Somerset are offered free snuff with their pints and landlord Paul Waters says it's becoming popular with younger drinkers.

"It goes very well with a pint but it has the image of being associated with older gentlemen," says Mr Waters. "But we've been recently seeing more and more younger people coming in and giving it a try.

"When the smoking ban kicks in next year we're expecting a lot more people to come in and use the snuff. It has got much more of a kick than many modern cigarettes and it comes in lots of different flavours."

But Cancer Research UK says those switching from smoking to snuff "will still be putting their health at serious risk".

"Snuff refers to a number of different products ranging from moist snuff, which is taken orally, to dry snuff, which is taken nasally," says the campaign group's director of tobacco control, Jean King.

"Individual products vary in their harmfulness and all are addictive because they contain nicotine."

Alternative tobaccos might seem novel, but they can be killers. The US National Cancer Institute points out that chewing tobacco can cause cancer of the oral cavity and more research is being done on the effects of snuff.

Sneeze?

If the health risks aren't bad enough, snuff also struggles with a bit of an image problem. Granted, it comes in a range of alluring scents - rose, cinnamon or mint, for example - and extraordinary flavours, such as whisky and camphor, but sniffing is rarely a dignified act.

Advice from the Wilsons website says the habit requires "a little perseverance". Perseverance indeed... to ingest it, one takes a pinch of snuff between thumb and finger and - there is no other way to describe it - inserts it up the nose.

A short, sharp sniff will send the tingling powder shooting up the nasal passages. Sneezing is inevitable, but experts say this subsides after a few more sniffs.

So, for the first-time snuffer, what's it like?

JJ Fox & Robert Lewis is a venerable tobacconist in the heart of London. Its main business is cigars but it does sell some snuff.

My two purchases come to a dizzying £1.60 - and that's enough snuff to last a serious user for a while.

Manager Paul Bielby says the Chinese used to take snuff from a small spoon, but I tap a little Red Bull - a strong menthol-scented snuff - on to the back of my hand.

As the soft brown powder hits the air, the scent of menthol rises strongly. I take a firm pinch as recommended and sniff hard. The scent rushes up my nose and the menthol immediately clears my head. I also get the nicotine rush that comes with smoking a cigarette although this feels a bit more intense, as if my senses seem sharpened.

Next up, is Ozona Raspberry. This does not go down so well, with its sickly smell.

Ness, Newcastle, England

Chewing tobacco is a bit worse from the glam perspective. Perhaps nicotine gum or patches could be additional options, available here over the counter in generic forms, but they are still expensive and addictive.

Candace, New Jersey, US

Great article, i have been using the swedish equivelent called snus (taken orally). In the pub there is always great interest. The more adventurous of my friends that have tried it like it. Some have even taken up the habit, however more on a part times basis. I have also been using snuff in Africa when my snus supplies have run out, both i think are great alternatives too cigarettes, however they do carry their health risks, not just cancer as stated above but also higher risks of heart disease etc. Cheers Doug.

Douglas Skoog, Ascot

With the pub ban on I can understand the problem;but the substitution of snuff for cigarettes is about as smart as avoiding pregnancy by employing anal sex.Let's just not mention chewing tobacco,ok?

Rob P., Vancouver, Canada

If smokers want to substitute the so called cancer sticks with snuff, then so be it. As an asthmatic non-smoker, I will merely be relieved that I will no longer have to partake in the activity passively!

JM , York

My husband is Swedish and uses 'snus', a tobacco product that comes in little round boxes. Most popular varieties come in little T-bag like pouches that can be tucked discretely between lip and gum. It smells disgusting (do not kiss someone with snus in their mouth!), leaves nasty brown stains in the lavatory bowl, but I don't have to smell or breathe in cigarette smoke when he uses it. It is a traditional product in Sweden and is great for those addicted, to use in the cinema, during flights etc. No - I have never tried it.

Barbara, Copenhagen, Denmark

Hmm. Another pro-tobacco story on the BBC website. Are we hearing the journo's agenda here? Certainly not a responsible attitude to public health. Perhaps a warning that tobacco taken into the mouth causes oral cancer? No, of course not.

Richard Smith, London

Maybe you could ask the Department of health an opinion on the sale of oral tobacco. As far as I am aware oral tobacco has been banned in all EU Member States for many years (apart from Sweden we got an exemption after a successful save our snuss campaign). Therefore, I am a little confused as to what the BBC is encouraging everyone to do. I would have thought that those that are selling chewing tobacco, etc in the UK are in fact breaking UK / EU law - surely the BBC does not want to become complicit in this?

Nicholas Bridgland, Brussels, Belgium

Snuff wont catch on, the only result in a smoking ban will be more people breaking the law.

Harry, Halesworth, Suffolk

Fine. Stupid people kill themselves and I don't have to breathe it.

Dan,

If snuff does become popular - or at least more commonplace - in pubs and bars, surely it will be only a matter of time before other powders such as cocaine are passed off as snuff and people stop heading to the toilets to do a line and do it in public places. I can't imagine anything worse than going for a drink with friends and being surrounded by people sneezing and snorting, whether the powder is legal or illegal.

Geri, Oxford

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4942446.stm

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