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Announcement of methodological changes to Statistics on Smoking, England, 2018

Change in methodology for estimating national smoking attributable hospital admissions and deaths (tables 3.1 to 3.4)

National estimates of smoking prevalence data are used in the calculation for the annual number of hospital admissions and deaths attributable to smoking. From 2018, the source of prevalence data will change from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to the Annual Population Survey (APS). Both surveys are run by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The formula used in the calculations for attributable hospital admissions and deaths is unchanged, and details can be found in the appendices document for the most recent publication:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB24228>

The change is being made as APS provides a greater sample size; around 320,000 households each year compared to around 2,000 households per month covered by OPN. This allows for greater precision when it comes to estimating the proportion of the population who currently smoke. It is also the survey already used by Public Health England (PHE) when calculating Local Authority level smoking attributable admissions and deaths for their Local Tobacco Control Profiles, which are included in NHS Digital's Statistics on Smoking report.

When comparing the new methodology with the old, the difference was small; 1,100 more admissions estimated to be caused by smoking; a change of 0.23 per cent in the number of admissions, and a change of 0.01 percentage points for the proportion of all admissions which are attributable to smoking. For deaths, the impact is 200 more deaths estimated to be caused by smoking; a change of 0.25 per cent in the number of deaths, and a change of less than 0.05 percentage points for the proportion of deaths attributable to smoking. We are therefore confident that time series data before and after the change can be considered comparable.

This change to definition was agreed at the Cross Departmental Working Group on Smoking Statistics which is chaired by NHS Digital and includes representatives from Department for Health and Social Care and PHE.

Change in methodology for calculating affordability of tobacco index (table 1.1)

The Affordability of Tobacco Index is calculated using the Tobacco Price Index (TPI), Retail Price Index (RPI) and Real Households Disposable Income Index, all published by ONS. We have previously set a base index year of 1980 for this calculation, reflecting the availability of previously published data.

This has been adjusted to a base index year of 1987, in order to align with that currently used by ONS in their RPI dataset. Re-basing to other years from the published ONS RPI data can introduce inaccuracies into the index, as calculations would be based on rounded data. Moving the base index year does not effect the time series trend.