

Face cancer shocks for child smokers

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CHIEF REPORTER

Schoolchildren are to be shown graphic images of young mouth cancer patients with deformed faces in an effort to stop them from smoking.

From this week, surgeons will also be sent into schools across the country to warn 12- and 13-year-olds that they could end up horribly disfigured if they take up the habit. This is part of a shock anti-smoking campaign by the British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (BAOMS), backed by the

Department of Health. Children will be shown 12 images, including pictures of people with swollen tongues.

The latest drive to get young people to quit is in response to doctors' growing concern about the health impact of smoking, especially on those who start at an early age. Official figures show that a third of children have tried cigarettes by the age of 11 and one in 10 of those aged 11-15 are regular smokers. There is also evidence that children are now aware of cigarettes before the age of five. As many as 450 start smoking every day.

Face cancer is the most visually disfiguring of cancers and patients often become socially isolated because they cannot talk clearly. Many have to be fed with liquids pumped into tubes in their stomach. The disease is twice as common as cervical or testicular cancer and a third of patients with mouth cancer die of the disease. But half of patients are ignorant of the fact that cancer can occur in the mouth so they do not see their doctors soon enough to be cured.

Pilot studies show that talking to image-conscious youngsters about face cancer and show-

ing them shocking pictures is the most effective way of discouraging them from smoking. Research by Saving Faces, a charity behind the campaign, found half of 12- to 16-year-olds gave up after learning about the link between smoking and face cancer during 15-minute assemblies.

Iain Hutchinson, a surgeon at Bart's, said: "In your teenage years, facial appearance is vitally important and anything that suggests that youngsters are going to have damage to their looks or end up dribbling down their chin is enough to put them off smoking."