



Sixty seconds on . . . snus

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First it was hygge, now it's snus. And then there's Billy. What's with all these Scandi trends?

Don't confuse categories. Hygge is Danish and means a cosy lifestyle. Billy is an IKEA bookcase (from Sweden) that's colonised the world. Both are better advertisements for Nordic life than those grim crime novels that fetishise serial killers in the snow.

And snus?

A form of tobacco, sold in pouches and stuck under the upper lip, a peculiarity of Sweden and Norway. Ingvar Kamprad, IKEA's founder, loves it. Users walk around with oddly swollen upper lips, which some people claim to find sexy.

Don't they spit?

Not at all. Snus doesn't generate the same volume of saliva as US chewing tobacco, thankfully.

Why do you care, if only Swedes and Norwegians indulge?

Snus could be coming to the UK. The High Court has just ruled that it will allow a challenge to the current ban on snus to go to the European Court of Justice. Campaigners are celebrating.

Gerry Stimpson, who chairs the New Nicotine Alliance, a charity that works for tobacco harm reduction, calls the ban stupid and snus "the world's most successful substitute for smoking."

Why is it banned?

The European Union acted in 1992 after claims that snus causes cancer. Sweden got an exemption as a condition of EU entry in 1994. And as a consequence, argue campaigners, Sweden has a much lower smoking prevalence than the rest of the EU.

What's the evidence on harm reduction?

Links have been found to pancreatic cancer and disturbances of heart rhythm. But because snus is sucked and not inhaled, the lungs don't suffer. Whatever the health effects (and they're contested), snus is a lot safer than cigarettes. So it is backed by those who favour "risk reduction" as part of the antismoking armoury and opposed by those who would like to see the word tobacco disappear entirely. If snus were legalised, opponents fear that it would provide a new entry point for tobacco addiction.

Especially if it's sexy, eh?

I'm not sure that whiffy breath and lots of used snus pouches littering the pavement are ever going to be sexy outside Sweden. But odder things have happened, like self assembly furniture.