

The state legislature is considering a bill that would ban selling high-sugar beverages over 16 ounces. The bill would also place a “fat tax” on all items that have a proportion of sugar or fat deemed to be excessive by health authorities. Proponents believe that this bill could be an important first step toward curbing the obesity problem in the state, which leads to increased medical costs for everyone. Opponents think the “nanny state” has overstepped its boundaries, and people should be able to purchase as much unhealthy food as they want. Would you support this bill? Are there other obesity-reduction bills that you would support?



The Food and Drug Administration believes it is morally imperative to reduce the number one preventable death in the country—smoking. To help achieve this aim, they have revealed large, graphic labels to be placed on all cigarette packs. The labels have pictures of deteriorated lungs, cancerous gums, and corpses. Large words say: “Smoking can kill you.” The FDA has stated that these labels can help prevent first-time users, and it will encourage current smokers to think about the risks every time they light up. What might be morally problematic about these labels? Do the moral goods outweigh these potential problems?



A new strain of sexually transmitted disease has hit the country. It has not become an epidemic yet, but health authorities are concerned that it could become one. To prevent it from spreading out of control, government officials want to mandate quarantine for everyone contaminated and everyone who *could* be contaminated—such as spouses and sexual contacts. No one knows much about this disease, and no treatment seems to work. As a result, the quarantine period might be lengthy. Is mandatory quarantine ever justified? What if the country cannot afford comfortable lodging for those who are quarantined? What if the people who are quarantined face lifelong stigma and disadvantages as a result of admitting they have (or could have) the illness?



1. What role, if any, should the government play in health promotion? What government actions to reduce smoking, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, and obesity do you support?
2. How should we weigh the duty to respect autonomy on the one hand and the duty of beneficence on the other in times of a health crisis?
3. Should individuals sacrifice their liberty, confidentiality, and privacy for the sake of public health? Are there limits?