

Sharp drop in smoking tobacco in India, says WHO report

Rajendra Kumar Tiwari, a social activist, wears a headgear made from empty cigarettes packets as he conducts an anti-tobacco awareness campaign to mark “World No Tobacco Day” in Mumbai on May 31, 2018. | Photo Credit: [REUTERS](#)

From 19.4% in 2000, the prevalence of smoking tobacco in India dropped down to 11.5% in 2005, according to a World Health Organisation report released on Thursday.

The report projected the prevalence to drop down further to 9.8% by 2020 and 8.5% by 2025.

“The prevalence of tobacco use has decreased more slowly in low and middle-income countries than in high-income countries, because the introduction of strong tobacco control policies by low and middle-income countries is impeded by relentless lobbying from the tobacco industry”, it stated.

While the report only covered tobacco usage in the form of smoking, India has a large population of chewing tobacco users, thus posing additional burden. Experts said the decrease therefore is nothing to rejoice over. “The drop in smoking prevalence is in sync with the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) outcome. However, India has a unique problem of chewing tobacco. More than 3/4th tobacco users have it in the chewing form. Therefore, we need policies that address this form of tobacco rigorously”, said Dr. Pankaj Chaturvedi, head and neck surgeon from Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai. Dr. Chaturvedi who is also India’s most vocal anti-tobacco activist said that it is upsetting that our government has turned a blind eye towards regulating pan masala.

Smoking down, but tobacco use still a major cause of death, disease: WHO

According to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, “Most people know that using tobacco causes cancer and lung disease, but many people are not aware that it also causes heart disease and stroke — the world’s leading killers.”

“This ‘World No Tobacco Day’, WHO is drawing attention to the fact that tobacco does not only cause cancer, it quite literally breaks your heart.”

While many people are aware that tobacco use increases the risk of cancer, there are alarming gaps in knowledge of the cardiovascular risks of tobacco use, said the health organisation.

India's declining number of tobacco users

It also noted that while tobacco use has declined markedly since 2000, the reduction is insufficient to meet globally agreed targets aimed at protecting people from death and suffering from cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure were major causes of cardiovascular diseases, including heart attacks and stroke, contributing to approximately three million deaths per year. But evidence revealed a serious lack of knowledge of the multiple health risks associated with tobacco.

In China, over 60% of the population was unaware that smoking could cause heart attacks, said the Global Adult Tobacco Survey.

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At around 2 a.m. on May 17 morning, a grievously sick Mohammed Salih, a 28-year-old architect from Kerala's Perambra town, was rushed by his family to

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