

World No Tobacco Day

Posted at: 02/06/2025

World No Tobacco Day: India's Fight Against the Silent Killer

Context:

Tobacco consumption remains a **major public health challenge in India**, contributing significantly to the **disease burden**, **premature mortality**, and **economic loss**. To address this, **World No Tobacco Day** is observed every year on **31st May**, to raise awareness about the health risks of tobacco and advocate for effective policies to reduce its use.

Tobacco Usage in India:

- India has the **second largest number of tobacco users in the world**.
- As per **Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS)**:
 - Around **28.6%-29%** of all adults in India use tobacco.
 - **42% of men** and **14% of women** are tobacco users.
- **Age-wise prevalence**:
 - **Men (50-64 years): 52.8%**
 - **Women (65+ years): 18.6%**
- **Smokeless Tobacco (SLT)**:
 - India accounts for **70% of the world's SLT users**.
- **Smoked Tobacco**:

- **Bidi** is more common than cigarettes, especially in rural and low-income areas.
 - **Rising Cigarette Usage:**
 - India has seen the **highest increase in global cigarette market share**.
 - **Regional Trends (NFHS-5):**
 - Most states saw a decline in male tobacco use.
 - However, **Sikkim, Goa, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Mizoram** reported an increase.
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Health Impacts of Tobacco:

- **Major risk factor** for 5 of the top 10 global causes of death:
 - **Ischemic heart disease, stroke, COPD, lower respiratory infections, lung cancers** (WHO).
- **Chemical content:** Tobacco smoke contains over **7,000 chemicals**, including **250+ toxic or cancer-causing substances**.
- **Cancer Risks:**
 - Tobacco (smoked and SLT) is linked to **lung, oral, stomach, head & neck, and pancreatic cancers**.
 - India ranks **first globally in male cancer incidence and mortality** (The Lancet).
 - In India, **oral cancer** is more prevalent than lung cancer among men.
- **Other Health Effects:**
 - Skin damage, vision and hearing loss, reduced fertility, and **erectile dysfunction**.
- **Life Expectancy Loss:**

- Each cigarette shortens life by **20 minutes**.
 - A **60-year-old smoker** typically has the health profile of a **70-year-old non-smoker**.
 - **Loss of Productive Years:**
 - Affects middle-age years rather than the end of life.
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Economic Impact:

- Tobacco use imposed a cost of **₹1.77 lakh crore** (about **1.04% of GDP**) in **2017-18**.
 - **Smoking:** 74% of this cost.
 - **SLT:** 26% of this cost.
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Government Initiatives:

- **COTPA, 2003:**
 - Bans smoking in public places, tobacco sale near educational institutions, and advertisement of tobacco products.
- **National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), 2007-08:**
 - Aims for effective COTPA implementation across states.
- **mCessation Programme:**
 - SMS-based tobacco cessation support (send **QUIT** to **56161**).
- **Tobacco-Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI):**
 - Prohibits tobacco sales/use within **100 yards of educational institutions**.

- **FSSAI Regulation (2011):**

- Bans **tobacco and nicotine in food items** (e.g., gutka).

- **Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019:**

- Bans **e-cigarette production, sale, import/export, and advertisement.**

- **Pictorial Health Warnings:**

- **85%** of tobacco packaging must carry graphic warnings.

- **Media Rules:**

- Mandatory **anti-tobacco spots (30 seconds)** in films and OTT platforms.
- **COTPA 2023 Amendment** mandates health disclaimers in online content.

- **Monitoring Surveys:**

- **GATS** and **NFHS** conducted periodically to track trends.

- **MPOWER Measures (WHO-FCTC):**

- Provides guidelines to reduce tobacco demand effectively.

Challenges in Tobacco Control:

- **Weak Enforcement:** Poor implementation of public smoking bans.

- **Multiple Forms:** Easy access to tobacco in various forms normalizes its use.

- **Illegal Trade:** Continued sale of banned e-cigarettes and gutka.

- **Industry Tactics:**

- Pricing strategies, policy lobbying, dense shop networks.
 - **Price Ineffectiveness:**
 - Rising incomes outpace tax hikes, keeping tobacco affordable.
 - **Tax Shifting:** Companies absorb taxes to avoid price increase.
 - **Loose Sales: Single cigarette sticks** still sold despite health warnings (banned in **88 countries**, not India).
 - **Cultural Normalisation:** Higher smoking rates in **urban areas (5%)** than **rural (3%)**.
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Way Forward:

India faces a **dual burden** of tobacco-related cancers and TB prevalence, making tobacco control both urgent and complex.

Recommended Measures:

- **Increase Taxes:** WHO recommends taxing tobacco at **75% of MRP**.
- **Raise Minimum Retail Price:** Prevent under-shifting by tobacco firms.
- **Ban Loose Sales:** To ensure exposure to warning labels and reduce impulsive buying.
- **Plain Packaging:** Reduces product appeal and promotes awareness.
- **Enforce Vendor Restrictions:** Especially near tea stalls to break the “chai-sutta” culture.
- **Boost Cessation Services:** Expand public screening and counselling programmes.