



INDIAN COUNCIL OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Department of Health Research – Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India

PRESS RELEASE

Smokeless Tobacco Control in 180 countries of the world: Call to Action for Full Implementation of WHO FCTC Measures

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A paper published today in the Lancet Oncology journal describes the extent of the policy implementation gap in smokeless tobacco (SLT) control, discusses its key reasons and makes recommendations to bridge this gap.

Professor Ravi Mehrotra, Director of the National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (ICMR-NICPR), India and the lead author of the paper said “Smokeless tobacco use as a public health concern requires a comprehensive approach to deal with the challenges identified in the paper. In this regard, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Global Knowledge Hub on Smokeless Tobacco (<https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/smokeless-tobacco/>) at ICMR-NICPR is committed to assisting all countries in implementing the key recommendations from the paper.”

Dr. Dharendra Sinha from the School of Preventive Oncology (co-author) highlighted the global burden of SLT use and said that “smokeless tobacco kills over half a million adults worldwide”.

Dr. Prakash Gupta, Director, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, Navi Mumbai and the senior author of the paper, said, "as per the WHO-FCTC, control policies need to be enforced for all types of tobacco including smokeless. Within the area of tobacco control, smokeless tobacco gets less attention from policy makers. The need of our times is to formulate and enforce strong control policies to curb it.

Prof Balram Bhargava, Secretary, Department of Health Research, Government of India and Director General ICMR, New Delhi mentioned that, “Given the extent and

multiple faces of SLT in India (almost 65% of the world SLT users are in India), the need of the hour is to undertake a national mission to fight SLT use by bringing together all stakeholders under one umbrella. In this regard, ICMR envisages a comprehensive and scientific approach to reduce the SLT burden of the country', he added.

There are approximately 1, 10 crore tobacco users in the world and almost a third of them (35.6 crore) use tobacco in the form of smokeless tobacco products. Smokeless tobacco refers to tobacco products that are consumed without smoking usually through mouth and nose.

Smokeless tobacco products are highly addictive and most are known to cause cancers of the mouth and neck, as well as heart disease and health problems for pregnant women. Smokeless tobacco products contain high levels of nicotine as well as cancer producing toxic chemicals. It contains more than 3000 chemicals of which about 30 are cancer causing. As a result, head and neck cancers are very common in those who consume such smokeless tobacco products. In India, where smokeless tobacco products are common, socially acceptable and part of cultural use, mouth cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths. Almost 90% of the oral cancers in India are due to the use of smokeless tobacco. Smokeless tobacco use is also very common among females and is more socially acceptable than the use of cigarettes in the country.

The paper concludes that Use of smokeless tobacco is becoming a global cause of concern requiring a greater commitment for full implementation of the evidence-based policy measures.

180 countries have already agreed to a common approach to control the demand and supply of tobacco using the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)

Important Findings of the paper:

1. Only 138 countries define smokeless tobacco in their statutes.
2. Only 34 countries have so far reported levying a tax on smokeless tobacco products.
3. Just six countries check and regulate the content of smokeless tobacco products.
4. Only 41 countries mandate pictorial health warnings on these products.
5. There are only a handful of public awareness campaigns on the harms associated with tobacco so far.
6. Only 16 countries have implemented a comprehensive ban on smokeless tobacco advertisement, promotion and sponsorships.

7. Globally, fewer smokeless tobacco users are advised to quit vis-à-vis smokers.

With regards,

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