



harmful effects

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT

SAY NO!!



Passive cigarette smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema and may complicate pregnancy.



# PICTORIAL HEALTH WARNINGS

Smoking to me  
is like Suicide...  
It is death in  
Anticipation.



# PICTORIAL HEALTH WARNINGS

Picture health warnings on tobacco packages effectively communicate the risks of tobacco use. Graphic warnings have greater impact and can be recognized by low literacy audiences and children – two vulnerable groups.

## What are pictorial health warnings and why are they important?

- Graphic health warnings on tobacco packages are an easy, inexpensive way to show the truth about tobacco consumption. The warnings will thus reach all users and increase knowledge about the risks of tobacco use.
- Picture health warnings are essential in a low-literacy, multilingual society to communicate the risks of tobacco use to consumers.
- In most countries of the world, pack warnings are mandatory and are stronger in size, content and graphic design.



## What are our national and international obligations vis-à-vis implementation of pack warnings?

**International obligations:** India should implement pack warnings as it has ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on 5 Feb 2004 and it has crossed the grace period of three years (Feb 2007) to implement the packaging and labeling rules (specified picture health warnings).

**National obligations:** As per the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA 2003), and rules notified under it, it is mandatory to implement pack warnings across all tobacco products in India.

Since Feb 1, 2007 till date, pictorial warnings in

India have been diluted thrice and delayed over half a dozen times. Strong, effective, evidence-based warnings notified by government on Sep 29, 2007 were rejected via a GOM decision and substituted with softer, un-tested images. The most recent May 3 2009 notification issued by the Government stated that pictorial health warnings would cover 40% of the principal display area (front side) of all tobacco product packages.

**Recent Supreme Court Order:** The Government of India gave an undertaking in the Supreme Court that pictorial health warnings on packages of tobacco products would be mandatory from 31 May 2009. This undertaking was given in the court during the hearing on a petition filed by the Health For Millions Trust against the Union of India and two other leading tobacco companies of India.



Following this, all tobacco products which are being retailed in India,, including those being imported, have to display pictorial health warnings from 1 June 2009 failing which the manufacturers and retailers will be attracting severe penalties under the provisions of COTPA 2003.

**What are the chief myths and realities regarding picture health warnings?**

**Myth: Health warning labels are ineffective as consumers already know the risks of tobacco use.**

**Reality: NO.**

Studies show that large proportions of consumers have inadequate knowledge of the health hazards of tobacco use. Health warning labels in many countries are ineffective because they do not meet size, message, or graphic image requirements. Instead, they are small, unnoticeable and provide unclear or misleading information. Only large, clear, warnings with pictures that cover at least 50% or more of the package's principal areas (front and back of the package) are effective.

**Myth: Most people buy single cigarettes, they won't even see packages.**

**Reality: NO.**

If the pictorial health messages are large and clear enough, people will see them when packets are displayed for sale, when they are taken out of smokers' pockets and purses, and when they are

discarded. Warning labels are one of the cheapest and widest-reaching forms of public education available, whether people are buying single cigarettes or packs.

**Myth: Rotating messages can be too expensive and difficult to maintain.**

**Reality: NO.**

Tobacco companies change their packaging all the time to promote new products, new flavors, and other new forms of deception. Therefore adding new warning labels should not be an issue. As a matter of fact, bidi packets that are exported from India carry pictorial health warnings as per the legislative mandate of the countries which import them.

**Myth: Pictorial health warnings not essential on bidi packets.**

**Reality: No. It is essential because:**

- Bidi is the widely used form of smoking tobacco. Nearly 53% of tobacco consumption is smoked as bidis.
- Out of 100 million people who smoke bidis, over 6 lakh die annually. Bidi smoking causes cancer, tuberculosis and serious heart and respiratory diseases.
- Majority of bidi smokers are illiterate and under privileged. They are least knowledgeable about the harmful effects of bidi smoking.

**Myth: Can the law pertaining to depiction of pictorial health warning on tobacco product packages lead to unemployment (especially in the bidi industry?).**



### **Reality: No.**

In other countries with similar pictorial warnings on tobacco packages, tobacco consumption steadily decreases no more than 1% per year. It is impossible for this to lead to a substantial decrease in employment, soon after implementation of the law.\*

### **Myth: Not implementing the law on pictorial warnings will be beneficial for the livelihood of tobacco farmers and bidi rollers.**



### **Reality: No.**

- Bidi workers suffer from multiple illnesses. They live a life of misery, constantly handling hazardous substances and exposing themselves to the risks of contracting TB, asthma, lung, skin, spinal problems among other diseases.
- There is a blatant violation of the Child Labor Regulation Act (1956) with large number of children engaged in the bidi making process. There is also a complete lack of transparency in the way the bidi industry operates, flouting the provisions specified under the labour law and violating basic human rights, especially of women and children.\*
- Findings from recent surveys in Anand, Gujarat reveal that the bidi workers, the majority (73%) of whom are bidi smokers, are in favour of pictorial health warnings on bidi packets.\*

### **What is the prevalent public opinion on pack warnings?**

An opinion poll survey commissioned by Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, Mumbai and Voluntary Health Association of India, Delhi and conducted by Synovate's Global Omnibus, in four metropolitan cities of India revealed an overwhelming support of Indians for large pictorial health warnings on tobacco products particularly on bidi packets.

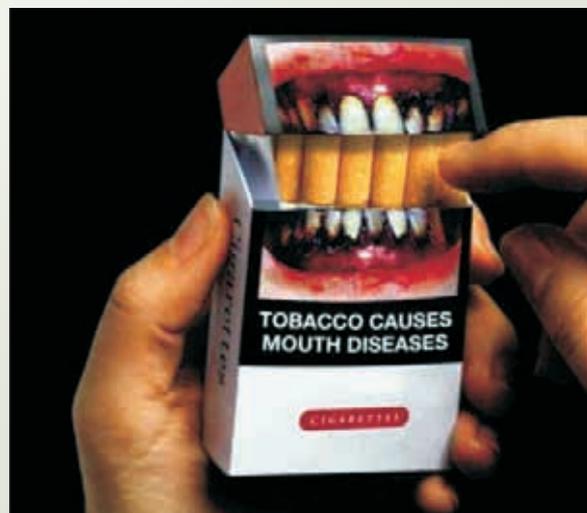
There is near-universal support (99%) for government action to improve the health warning labels on tobacco products (requiring them to be larger and include pictures to better communicate the dangers of tobacco use).

98% of the respondents support implementation of health warning labels on packs of bidis as on cigarettes. Support for the warning labels is strong in each city, with a large majority of those interviewed in Delhi (97%), Mumbai (100%), Chennai (98%), and Kolkata (98%) agreeing that the government should implement strong pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products.

### **What are the best practices in other countries? Have warnings reduced usage and uptake of tobacco?**

Many countries have already implemented picture health warnings on cigarette packages as per the recommendations of WHO - FCTC with success. They are experiencing reduction in tobacco use as pack warnings are 60% more effective in encouraging cessation and prevention.

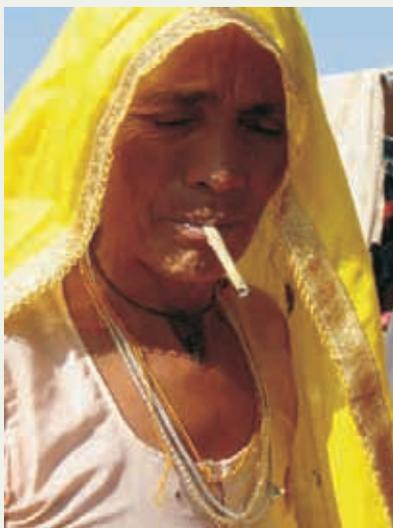
### **Evidence from Canada and Australia show that pictorial warnings increase awareness about health risks and decrease consumption.\***



- **Canada** was the first country to implement health warnings on cigarette packets in year 2000. These cover 50% of the back and front sides – one side in English and second, in French (the two official languages of Canada). It has 16 types of warning labels and prohibits the words, “mild and light” on its packages.
- **Australia:** Graphic health warnings cover 60% of package space (30% of the front and 90% of the back) which rank as most in the world along with New Zealand. Two sets of warnings are rotated every 12 months and they cover all tobacco products. The words, “light” and “mild” are banned from appearing on the packets.
- **Belgium:** Picture warnings cover 56% of the package (48% front and 63% of the back) across all tobacco products. There are 3 sets of warnings, totaling 42 labels and a different set is rotated annually. Belgium also prohibits the use of “light” and “mild” words on packages.
- **Thailand:** Health warnings cover 50% of the back and 50% of the front of all cigarette and other tobacco product packets. So far 2 sets of warnings have been introduced since 2005. The terms, “light” and “mild” are banned from appearing on packages.
- **New Zealand:** Health warnings cover 60% of the total package space (30% of the front and 90% of the back cover) of every

cigarette package. Two sets of warnings are rotated every year and the terms “light” and “mild” are prohibited from appearing on packages. Warnings appear in the two official languages - English and Maori.

- **Singapore:** Health warnings cover 50% of the package space (50% of front and back) and appear on all tobacco products. A set of six warnings are in place which rotate every 24 months.





## Key Messages:

- Pictorial health warnings are the most effective way to show the truth about the health hazards of tobacco use to existing as well as potential consumers. They also have a greater impact on two most vulnerable categories - low-literate consumers and children.
- As per FCTC obligations and as per the Indian Tobacco Act, pack warnings are mandatory on all tobacco products available in India. After several delays and dilution of earlier stronger warnings, the Supreme Court issued an order to implement pictorial warnings on all tobacco products packages from 31st May 2009. Failure to comply by manufacturers and retailers will attract severe penalties under the provisions of COTPA 2003.
- Pack warnings are essential on bidi packets as bidi is the most widely used form of tobacco in India. It is a myth that pack warnings will lead to unemployment among bidi workers- it will only convey the truth about the risks associated with bidi smoking.
- There is universal support for pack warnings in India. 73% of bidi workers surveyed in Anand, Gujarat support pictorial health warnings. In a recent opinion poll conducted by VHAI and Healis, 98% of respondents support pack warnings on bidi and cigarette packets.
- Many countries have implemented graphic health warnings on tobacco packets sold in their countries. Evidences from Canada, Australia, Thailand and Singapore show that pack warnings increase awareness about health risks and decrease consumption.

<sup>i</sup> "Support Pictorial Health Warnings on all Tobacco Products", Advocacy Health Cards developed by HRIDAY-AFTC, 2008

<sup>ii</sup> Caught in a Death Trap: The Story of bidi rollers of West Bengal and Gujarat, Study based on primary research on home-based bidi rollers, Voluntary Health Association of India.

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<sup>iv</sup> Caught in a Death Trap: The Story of bidi rollers of West Bengal and Gujarat, Study based on primary research on home-based bidi rollers, Voluntary Health Association of India.

<sup>v</sup> [www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets), 2008

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