



Global smoking and its impact on health

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The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing around 6 million people a year. Nearly 80% of the more than 1 billion smokers worldwide live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illness and death is heaviest. Tobacco users, whether using cigarettes, bidis or other forms of smokeless tobacco, who develop serious illness or die prematurely, deprive their families of income, raise the cost of health care and hinder economic development.¹

Tobacco smoke contains thousands of chemicals, with a hundred being damaging to health and 55 being known carcinogens.² Tobacco smoking has long been associated with lung cancer, heart disease and adverse effects on pregnancy but the evidence is growing for strong associations with COPD, mental illness, stroke, chronic kidney disease and gastrointestinal malfunction. Tobacco use also increases the risk of deafness, infertility and post-operative complications, particularly following plastic and orthopaedic surgery.²

Tobacco users need to be educated about the adverse effects of smoking and given intensive assistance to help them quit. Studies show that few people understand the specific health risks of tobacco use. For example, a 2009 survey in China revealed that only 38% of smokers knew that smoking causes coronary heart disease and only 27% knew that it causes stroke.³ Counselling and medication can more than double the chance that a smoker who tries to quit will succeed. National cessation services with full or partial cost-coverage are available to assist tobacco users to quit in only 24 countries, representing 15% of the world's population. There is no cessation assistance of any kind in one quarter of low-income countries.⁴



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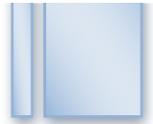
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Hard-hitting anti-tobacco advertisements and graphic pack warnings – especially those that include pictures – reduce the number of children who begin smoking and increase the number of smokers who quit. Graphic warnings can persuade smokers to protect the health of non-smokers by smoking less inside the home and avoiding smoking near children.⁵

Mass media campaigns can also reduce tobacco consumption by influencing people to protect non-smokers and convincing youths to stop using tobacco. Over half of the world's population lives in the 39 countries that have aired at least 1 strong anti-tobacco mass media campaign within the last 2 years. Bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship can reduce tobacco consumption.⁶

Tobacco taxes are the most cost-effective way to reduce tobacco use, especially among young and poor people. A tax increase that bolsters tobacco prices by 10% decreases tobacco consumption by around 4% in high-income countries and by about 5% in low and middle-income countries. Even so, increasing tobacco taxes is a measure that is rarely implemented. Only 33 countries, with 10% of the world's population, have introduced taxes on tobacco products so that more than 75% of the retail price is tax.⁷



The WHO is leading the fight against the global tobacco epidemic. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control⁸ entered into force in February 2005. Since then, it has become one of the most widely embraced treaties in the history of the United Nations with 180 parties covering 90% of the world's population. The WHO Framework Convention is the organisations most important tobacco control tool and a milestone in the promotion of public health. It is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of people to the highest standard of health, provides legal dimensions for international health cooperation and sets high standards for compliance.

In 2008, WHO introduced a practical, cost-effective way to scale up implementation of provisions of the WHO Framework Convention on the ground: MPOWER. Each MPOWER measure corresponds to at least 1 provision of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The 6 MPOWER measures are:

- 1) Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
- 2) Protect people from tobacco use
- 3) Offer help to quit tobacco use
- 4) Warn about the dangers of tobacco
- 5) Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- 6) Raise taxes on tobacco.

Greater efforts are needed to implement tobacco control measures in low- and middle-income countries. To increase taxes and reduce advertising

with an improved infrastructure to provide smoking cessation advice and support should be a priority. Only then will these countries rid themselves of the surge of tobacco.

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