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Let tobacco be out of reach
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Let tobacco be out of reach

It is important that tobacco products are made less accessible and less affordable for youth to prevent them from getting into the habit of using tobacco...

Today, tobacco use among youth is growing at an alarming rate.

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS 2006) reveals that more than 14 per cent of youth in the country, use tobacco in any form. It is clear that the tobacco industry specifically targets adolescents and young adults.

It is therefore very important that tobacco products are made less accessible and less affordable for youth to prevent them from getting into the habit of using tobacco. Prohibition on sale of tobacco products around educational institutions is one such effective measure.

Tobacco is the leading cause of death that kills 5.4 million people every year, globally. Seventy percent of these deaths occur in developing countries. India being among the largest producers and consumers of tobacco, faces the major brunt of tobacco, with constant increase in its use. According to the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06), nearly 11 per cent women and 57 per cent men use tobacco in India. Tobacco use has assumed the dimension of an epidemic resulting in enormous disability, disease and death with 17 per cent of the smokers of the world living in India. It is estimated that by 2010 smoking will cause about one million adult deaths in India, annually.

It is also well established that life style changes can only be brought by altering the environment and if the ban of sale of tobacco products is lifted, it contradicts the basic tenet of the behavioral change and the tactic inculcated thereof in the law to keep children off tobacco giving school children an easier access to tobacco products.

According to a recent report, few elected representatives of India are lobbying with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) against a provision of the tobacco control law which prohibits sale of tobacco products within a radius of 100 yards for all educational institutions passed by the Parliament in 2003. Few MPs are advocating with the PMO to lift the ban with deep concerns for the shop keepers and small traders.

Advocacy Forum for Tobacco Control (AFTC), which is a coalition of 61 Indian NGOs working in the area of advocacy, awareness, promotion and research related to tobacco control in India is taking all necessary steps required to prevent such a disaster to occur. A letter on behalf of all the AFTC members is being sent today, to the Prime Minister, expressing serious concern on the matter. In addition to Dr Gupta the letter has been signed by Dr Srinath Reddy from Hriday, Alok Mukhopadhyay of VHAI and Dr Mira Aghi.

According to Dr Prakash C Gupta, director, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, "It is with the genuine concern over tobacco use, that 168 countries have become party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). India was 7th country to ratify the treaty in 2004. Article 16.1 .b of the FCTC states 'banning the sale of tobacco products in any manner by which they are directly accessible, such as store shelves.' In India, banning sale of tobacco products near schools is an important way of meeting this provision in the FCTC. We believe that the gross reality of tobacco has missed the attention of few MPs of the country and their demand to do away with the prohibition on sale of tobacco products within 100yards of educational institutions, is a result of their limited understanding of the adverse impacts of tobacco use on health, economy, environment and society, at large"

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More than 14 per cent of youth in the country, use tobacco in various forms. It is clear that the tobacco industry specifically targets adolescents and young adults...