

Thursday, March 11, 2010

Tobacco warnings go explicit

Publication: Mail Today, Edition: Delhi, Journalist: Savita Verma, Page No: 6, Location: Middle-Left, Width(cms): 20, Height(cms): 16, Size(sq.cms): 320

# Tobacco warnings go explicit

By Savita Verma  
in New Delhi

PICTORIAL warnings on tobacco products are set to get scarier.

After almost a year of mild warnings, the government has decided to shift to more powerful messages. Tobacco products will now carry pictures of mouth cancer, showing rotting teeth and lips.

A notification was issued by the health ministry on March 5 and the new warnings will come into force from June 1. These would be implemented under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling Amendment) Rules, 2010.

The warnings show a real picture of mouth cancer with a caption "tobacco causes mouth cancer". Cigarette packs will carry the same picture with the caption "smoking kills", while chewing or smokeless products will carry the

caption "tobacco kills".

The new warnings have been pretested for their effectiveness by the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) and the Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health.

"The new warnings are certainly an improvement over the previous ones. Older warnings, which showed an X-ray of a lung or a diseased lung or a scorpion, were not effective," said Dr K. Srinath Reddy of the Public Health Foundation of India.

**They will come into force from June 1**

Research in developed countries has shown that depicting the health impact of tobacco in the form of pictures was effective.

The new warnings were field-tested in Orissa, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh by VHAI. In Maharashtra, these were tested by the Healis-Sekhsaria Insti-



(Above) The new warnings will have photos of mouth cancer, showing rotting teeth and lips; the current warnings show an X-ray of a lung or a diseased lung or a scorpion.

tute for Public Health.

The study was conducted using 11 images and response was sought from 735 people, including tobacco-users, women and youth. Ninety-eight per cent of people said the pictures of mouth cancer would deter tobacco-users.

"They said they will not send their children to buy cigarettes if these pictures were printed on tobacco products," Bhavna Mukhopadhyaya of the VHAI said. The study was sent to the health ministry last month.

Pictorial warnings were enforced on May 31 last year after the intervention of the Supreme Court. The apex court

had directed the government to enforce the rules strictly.

The pictorial warnings were proposed in July 2006 under the Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003. Back then, the proposal was to print warnings in the form of pictures of skull and bones, real-life pictures of cancer patients, dead bodies, and a child dying due to the effects of smoking and mouth cancer lacerations and tumours. However, the warnings that came into effect last year were milder.

Health experts said the government should also focus on the implementation of new warnings as tobacco companies were violating the rules.