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**Fresh scare tactics by health ministry**

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**ANTI-SMOKING DRIVE**

# Fresh scare tactics by health ministry

New pictorial warnings will be put on cigarette packets as the present ones have been found to be ineffective



COME June 1, cigarette packets and tobacco products across the country will carry a new set of pictorial health warnings, as per the Gazette of India notification by the Central Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The ineffectiveness of the pictorial warnings on tobacco products which was enforced on May 31 2009, led authorities to come up with these new pictures. This has come about with advocacy from various organisations which conducted survey in different states and found that the pictorial warnings on tobacco products were ineffective.

Further, the rules mandate that the pictorial warnings should be rotated every 12 months; thus the new warnings showing picture of oral cancer, will be implemented in June.

During the study conducted by Institute of Public Health (IPH) community workers in KG Halli, Bangalore, they found that the current pictorial warnings were not perceived by public as X-ray of cancer lung, and failed to pass the intended message. Says Upendra Bhojani, faculty, IPH, "The current picture warnings elicited varied and strange responses. One person said that it is a photo of two black birds eating some white stuff placed between them. Another said it is a photo of a person wearing black jacket."

"The warning label in English is not

readable by the many who do not know English. The whole purpose was that even the illiterate shall get the message through the prominent pictures that can speak a thousand words. But we got an entirely different response during the study," he added.

A similar study conducted by Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health in Mumbai came up with similar results.

"We conducted surveys on four different sections of people — professionals, labourers, students above 18 years and females who were both tobacco users as well as non-users and very few people could actually get the message through the pictures," said Dr Lalit Raute, Healis. The field test for efficacy with the new pictures to be implemented was done by

Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI), an NGO, across seven states - Orissa, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Apparently, the new pictures were found to be much more effective in delivering the message than the previous ones.

However, speaking to Express about the implementation of the new set of pictorial warnings in tobacco products, Dr Riyaz Basha, nodal officer, District Anti-Tobacco Cell, said, "The new rule is likely to be implemented across all states effective from June 1 that falls on World No-Tobacco Day. But we have not received the circulation from the Centre yet. We are waiting for it."



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— Dr Lalit Raute

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