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Even passive smoking can lead to tuberculosis (TB), chest physicians warned on Wednesday — the World Tuberculosis Awareness Day.

Nearly 61% of the TB deaths can be attributed to smoking. A smoker with active pulmonary TB can transmit the disease to children by smoking in front of them. Passive smoking accelerates development of active TB, experts said.

The risk of prevalence of TB infection is more among current or ex-smokers than among those who never smoked, a WHO report said.

“Smoking lowers lung immunity, as well as the overall body immunity. Therefore, smokers are more prone to developing TB. That goes for not just active smokers, but passive smokers as well,” Dr Ashok Mahashur, consultant chest physician, Hinduja Hospital, said.

“People in cities like Mumbai need to be extra careful. The smokers’ population is high, and so is the environmental pollution. Not surprisingly, we see a higher incidence of TB in the city,” he added.

Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, Navi Mumbai, did a survey to study the possible association between smoking and tuberculosis on 81,443 men over 35 years of age. The 12-year-long study showed that the number of beedi smokers dying of TB was 2.6 times more than that of the never-smokers.

Another alarming trend is the rise in cases of the multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB. According to the latest health report by the WHO, India and China account for 50% of the world’s total MDR TB cases.

“An MDR TB patient does not respond to the most effective anti-TB drugs available. In India, 3% of the total new TB cases reported every year are MDR TBs,” chest physician Dr Shrikant Redkar said.

“Tackling MDR TB is a huge challenge. It is important to treat freshly diagnosed patients in a proper manner, and to ensure that they finish the course of medicine,” said Dr Mahashur.