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Awareness, taxes on tobacco products needed to curb TB: Gupta

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Awareness about the casual association between smoking and tuberculosis (TB), and strict government measures like heavy taxes on tobacco products are needed to reduce the number of smokers in [India](#), a health expert said.

Healis Sekhsaria Institute of PublicHealth, Director, Dr P C Gupta, on the eve of World TB Day, said, "Currently, bidi-making is not taxed at the same level as the rest of the tobacco industry, despite of the fact that bidi smoking is one of the largest killers in India compared to other forms of tobacco combined".

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) figures, the prevalence of TB in India is over 3.4 million or about one-fifth of the global figure. India, has 240 million tobacco users, including 100 million who smoke beedis and is classified along with the sub-Saharan African countries as nations with high incidence TB cases.

India contributes to nearly 17 per cent of the world's smokers, a habit associated with TB which kills two people every three minutes.

" Contrary to the West, a large number of deaths in India among smokers is from tuberculosis and not from lungcancer and mortality rate due to beedi smoking far outweighs other forms of smoking. Most men in our country get infected with asymptomatic tuberculosis - that is smoking damages the lungs to such an extent that the latent infection can not be sustained, eventually leading to death. Smoking increases the risk of infection from the TB causing bacteria, the risk of progression of the disease and the risk of death among TB patients," Dr Gupta said.

In a [study](#) conducted by Dr Gupta and his team among individuals in the age group between 15-35 years, it was found smoking, including beedi smoking, may increase the risk of clinical disease and leads to an increased probability of death from tuberculosis.

Further, the study revealed the prevalence of TB was far greater among the smokers compared to non-smokers. Approximately, 32 per cent of tuberculosis deaths in India are due to beedi smoking.

"While it is true that TB is more common among the lower socio-economic groups because of over-crowding and poverty, the common use of smoking and tobacco, play a major role in the spread of the disease which is swelling despite the fact that there is a cure available for it," said Dr Gupta.