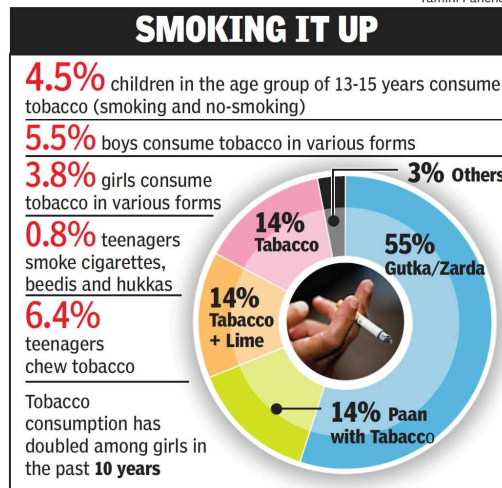


'Youngsters prefer chewing tobacco to taking a puff'

Pratibha Masand | TNN

Mumbai: Mumbaikars who worry that their adolescent children would take up smoking due to peer pressure, may now have an extra reason to worry. A study conducted by a team of city doctors shows that youngsters were more into chewing tobacco than smoking—in fact the former addiction was six times more than the latter. In fact, the number of youngsters in Mumbai consuming chewing tobacco youngsters has more than doubled in a decade.

The survey was conducted by Healix Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, University of California, and Tata Memorial Hospital on 1,533 children in the age group of 13-15 years. "We found that 0.8% youngsters smoke, while 6.4% chew tobacco. As compared to a study done by Global Youth Tobacco Survey in 2000, which found that 1.4% city kids smoked and 2.8% consumed smokeless tobacco, the number has more than doubled," said Dr Avinash Sonavane



from Healix Institute. The children surveyed were from 26 private and government-aided schools.

Doctors, incidentally, blame "the Indian culture" for the rise in tobacco chewing. "In India, it is considered a taboo for youngsters to

smoke in front of elders. But having pan masala is perfectly fine. In fact, we have seen many cases, in which the parents themselves start giving small grains of pan masala to teething children," said Dr Surendra Shastri, professor and head of the pre-

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S Shastri | TATA HOSPITAL

ventive oncology department in Tata Memorial Hospital. "The cost also matters, as a pan masala packet costs 50 paise and a pack of 20 cigarettes Rs 100. Even those pan masalas that claim to be 100% free of tobacco are carcinogenic," he added.

The survey has also revealed that there has been a rise in the number of girls consuming tobacco, and the figure has been pretty high. "While a decade ago, 3.8% boys and 1.4% girls chewed tobacco, the percentages have gone up to 7.3 and 4.4 now," Sonavane added.