

China tobacco firms targeting children

Shenzhen: Chinese tobacco companies are targeting women and children as potential smokers as the market in men has peaked, health experts said on Thursday.

Around 53% of Chinese men smoked, leading tobacco control activist Judith Mackay said, but only three per cent of Chinese women. "Prevalence in men has peaked, but they are targeting women and children," she said at the World Cancer Congress in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen.

As the world's largest consumer and producer of tobacco with over 300 million smokers, health experts warned that tobacco firms in China were becoming more sophisticated in targeting their market.

"Girls in China are getting more independent and they

have more money to spend," Mackay said.

China's 1.3 billion population carries an enormous cancer burden. With one in every three cigarettes in the world smoked in China, the nation had 2.82 million new cancer cases and 1.96 million cancer deaths in 2008.

Despite the massive health costs, experts say Chinese tobacco firms are skirting tobacco laws with tactics such as printing health warnings in English, rather than Chinese.

"The law mandates that the health warning should cover 30% of the packaging," said professor Yang Gonghuan, deputy general director of the Chinese centre for disease control and prevention. "But in actuality the words are very small. It's a fine line." -Reuters