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Bureau

Concerned over the postponement of new anti-tobacco pictorial warnings, which were to be printed on all tobacco products, a health group has approached the Supreme Court.

The application, filed by Health For The Millions Trust in the first week of July, challenges the health ministry's May 17, 2010 notification postponing the implementation of the new warnings.

"This stay application is a part of the ongoing public interest litigation filed by the foundation to ensure the implementation of pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products," Managing trustee Alok Mukhopadhyay said. It will come up for hearing in August.



The Centre had committed to print new pictorial warnings-depicting mouth cancer by showing rotting teeth and lips-from June 1. But this was delayed by six months and the new warnings are to now come into force from December 2010.

Public health groups have been unhappy with this. A study by the Healis-Sekharia Institute for Public Health has shown that the current pictorial warnings are ineffective.

The anti-tobacco Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act makes it compulsory for the government to rotate pictorial warnings after a year, health experts said.

The pictorial warnings were enforced on May 31, 2009 after a Supreme Court directive to the Centre. They had been proposed in July 2006.

Initially, the visuals proposed were skull-and-bones, cancer patients, dead bodies, a child dying due to the effects of smoking and mouth cancer lacerations and tumors.

But the warnings that came into force last year were milder.

The new warnings will display picture of mouth cancer with the caption 'Tobacco causes mouth cancer'. Products to be smoked will carry a caption 'Smoking kills' atop the picture while chewable or smokeless products will carry the caption 'Tobacco Kills'.

"The new warnings are better. The previous ones were ineffective," Dr K. Srinath Reddy of the Public Health Foundation of India said.

According to research conducted in developed countries, depicting the impact of tobacco pictorially is effective.

