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'Smokers not adequately warned'

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PUBLIC health experts suggest that for a country like India, where most of the rural population is illiterate, the pictorial warnings on the tobacco products should have bigger display area for more visibility and impact to discourage tobacco use.

The World Health Organisation has estimated that India has the second largest number of smokers in the world, after China, and nearly 17 per cent of the world's smokers.

According to Article 11 of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the package health warning should cover at least 50 per cent of the ciga-

rette pack. In India, the size of the warning was reduced from 50 per cent of the principal display area on both sides of the pack to 40 per cent on the front only.

"India has seen repeated setbacks in implementing improved package health warning. Pictorial warnings and images are meant to help users visualise the nature of tobacco-related diseases. The pictorial warning should be strong to be effective and should repel the user. But the government has often diluted the package health warnings," said Dr PC Gupta, director, Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health.

"The tobacco industry obstructs effective tobacco control measures," he added.