

Tobacco Epidemic in India

Why in news?

Tobacco is the most widely recognized preventable cause of disease and death globally, posing significant health and environmental challenges.

Status of tobacco use in India

- In India, it is estimated that nearly 26 crore people consumed tobacco in 2016-2017, making it the second-highest tobacco-consuming country after China.
- The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) indicates that in India, of all adults, 28.6% currently consume tobacco either in smoked or smokeless form, including 42.4% of men and 14.2% of women.
- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India is the second-largest consumer and producer of tobacco.
- The most prevalent form of tobacco use in India is smokeless tobacco and commonly used products are khaini, gutkha, betel quid with tobacco and zarda.
- Tobacco use is recorded to be more than 40% in the North-eastern states of India, the highest being in Tripura.
- **Health risks**-It extend to the 60 lakh people employed in the tobacco industry, who are exposed to diseases from absorbing tobacco through the skin.
- It is one of the major causes of death and disease in India and accounts for nearly 1.35 million deaths every year.

What are the steps taken by India to control tobacco use?

- **COTPA, 2003**- The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act regulates tobacco advertising, promotion and sale, it bans tobacco sales within 100 yards of educational institutions.

COTPA ensures effective implementation of WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

- **National Tobacco Control Program (NTCP), 2007**- It aims to raise awareness about tobacco harms and assist people in quitting.
- **Prohibition of Electronic Cigarette Act (PECA), 2019**-Prohibition on the sale of e-cigarettes and related products which includes Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) and Heated Tobacco Products.
- **mCessation program**- It is a mobile technology based program by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, WHO, and International Telecommunication Union that provides customized guidance via text messages to encourage tobacco users to quit.
- **Ban by FSSAI**-Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) banned tobacco and nicotine in food items, this resulted in ban of gutka and flavored smokeless

tobacco products.

- **Tobacco taxation-** India has implemented tobacco taxes to discourage consumption.
- **Smoke free places-** Smoking is completely banned in many public places and workplaces, including healthcare facilities, educational institutions, government offices, and public transport.

What are the impacts of tobacco use in India?

- **Passive smoking-** Non-smokers, including children and pregnant women, are at risk due to exposure to secondhand smoke, leading to respiratory infections, low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and other health problems.
- **Occupational Hazards-** Those employed in the tobacco industry, especially in cultivation and processing, face health risks from absorbing nicotine through their skin, which can cause nicotine poisoning and other related illnesses.
- **Impact on health-** It is a major risk factor for many chronic diseases, including cancer, lung disease, cardiovascular disease and stroke.
- **Lack of legislative framework-** In 2020, an amendment under COTPA has aimed to make licensing mandatory for tobacco product production, supply, and distribution, but the bill was not passed.
- **Policy paralysis-** A study found no significant difference in bidi or cigarette consumption reduction between NTCP and non-NTCP districts as there were challenges like insufficient staffing, resource allocation and monitoring mechanisms.
- **Economic burden-** India incurred a loss exceeding 1.7 lakh crore rupees due to tobacco's health effects in 2017-2018.
- **Productivity loss-** Workers suffering from tobacco-related diseases are less productive, and the economic contribution of those who die prematurely is lost.
- **Tobacco taxation-** It is not regularly adjusted for inflation, and over time tobacco products are becoming increasingly affordable.
- **Tax evasion-** Illegal methods such as smuggling, illicit manufacturing affects tobacco taxation efforts.
- **Industry influence-** India's tobacco interference index has worsened, indicating industry influence in governance.
- **Soil erosion-** Tobacco cultivation is erosive and depletes soil nutrients.
- **Deforestation-** It occurs due to tobacco production in the rate of 5.4 kg of wood per 1 kg of tobacco.
- **Waste accumulation-** Tobacco production and consumption generate a substantial amount of waste, including cigarette butts, packaging, and plastic waste, contributing to environmental pollution.

What lies ahead?

- Ensure strict enforcement of the COTPA and increase fines for violations to ensure regular monitoring and compliance checks.
- Increase the tax burden on all tobacco products (cigarettes, bidis, and smokeless tobacco) to at least 75% of the retail price, as recommended by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).
- There is a need to launch sustained, high-impact mass media campaigns to educate the

public about the dangers of tobacco use.

References

1. [The Hindu- Tobacco epidemic in India](#)
2. [NCDIR- Tobacco use in India](#)

