

## 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](#)

