



# Tobacco

## Pictorial or graphic health warnings on tobacco packaging

### Background

Pacific nations have ratified the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which came into force on 27 February 2005. Pictorial (or graphic) health warnings are an important part of the World Health Organization's six key strategies to fight the global tobacco epidemic, with many countries already introducing new regulations regarding pictorial health warnings on all tobacco packaging.

### Why should pictorial warnings be introduced?

Research has shown that most smokers can only recall well-known illnesses caused by smoking and that they significantly underestimate the health risks from smoking. Existing written health warnings like 'Smoking is addictive' and 'Smoking kills', are often just not recalled by smokers.

Studies have shown that large pictorial health warnings are the most effective way for tobacco packages to convey the range and severity of health risks associated with tobacco consumption, and to encourage positive behavioural changes.

### What types of pictorial health warnings are there?

Typically a range of pictorial warnings are developed, but they are not all released simultaneously. Pictorial warnings are often rotated to give them a longer 'shelf life'. Commonly used health warnings, for which pictorial warnings have been developed, include the following;

- Smoking kills
- Smoking is addictive (or highly addictive)
- Smoking causes blindness
- Smoking causes gangrene
- Smoking causes mouth cancer
- You are not the only one smoking this cigarette
- Over 80% of lung cancers are caused by smoking
- Tobacco smoke is poisonous
- Smoking causes heart attacks
- Smoking can make you impotent
- Smoking causes foul and offensive breath
- Your smoking can harm your kids
- Smoking causes serious lung diseases
- Smoking more than doubles your risk of stroke
- Smoking blocks your arteries

The pictorial images cover a range of health issues, including lung cancer, mouth cancer, gangrenous feet caused by peripheral vascular disease, lungs affected by emphysema, clogged arteries, impotence, and can play an essential part in communicating the health risks associated with smoking.

### **What proportion of the pack should they cover?**

The warnings are most effective when they are very prominent on the pack, provide specific information, evoke an emotional response and are changed regularly. Pictures can be understood by everyone without having to read any text.

The tobacco control treaty requires ratifying countries to implement warnings that cover at least 30 per cent of the front and back of the cigarette pack and recommends that warnings cover at least 50 per cent of both panels and include pictorial images. Where available cigarette packets will also carry information on where to get information and help about quitting smoking. Where 'quit lines' are available the quit line number will be included.

### **What steps are required to make pictorial health warnings a reality?**

Pretesting messages	All written health warnings and graphic pictorial health warnings need to be tested with the public, preferably by undertaking qualitative research (focus groups).
Legislation and regulation	National legislation may need to be reviewed and specific regulations requiring graphic pictorial health warnings may need to be developed. A designated date must be specified after which all imported tobacco products and any locally manufactured tobacco products must display pictorial warnings.
Supporting publicity/awareness and public education	Where feasible the introduction of new pictorial warnings should be accompanied by supporting radio, press and television commercials. Where 'quit lines' or other services are available, smokers should be encouraged to use them.
Retailer education	Retailers should be informed about the new pictorial warnings and that they are required to stop selling cigarettes and other tobacco products featuring the old text warnings by a specified date.
Ongoing development and rotation of pictorial health warnings	Pictorial health warnings should be rotated each year after initial introduction.

### Where can I get more information?

Many countries have already introduced pictorial warnings.

More information on the introduction of graphic pictorial health warnings on tobacco packages can be found at:

<http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/tobacco-warnings> (New Zealand - Ministry of Health)

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/tobac-tabac/legislation/label-etiquette/graph/index-eng.php> (Health Canada)

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Tobacco/Tobaccogeneralinformation/DH\\_4083845](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Tobacco/Tobaccogeneralinformation/DH_4083845) (United Kingdom - Department of Health)

[http://tobaccofreecenter.org/press\\_release/2007/10/15/india\\_uk\\_picturewarnings](http://tobaccofreecenter.org/press_release/2007/10/15/india_uk_picturewarnings) (Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids - Press release on India and U.K)

### What do the pictorial health warnings look like?

Some people find the images very graphic. Here's a sample of images currently in use.



However you might feel about the images, research around the world shows they increase motivation and intention to quit smoking, and increase calls to 'quit lines' where they are available. When the warnings are combined with information about where to go to seek help, this increases the confidence of smokers to quit. In some countries cigarette packets include inserts with information about quitting.

More than 80 per cent of cancers of the mouth, nose and throat occur in people who smoke cigarettes, cigars or pipes, and the more you smoke and the longer you smoke for, the greater your risk.



With extremely high smoking rates in some Pacific countries and an increasing burden from diseases like diabetes, cancer and heart disease, it's time to act on this issue. Pictorial warning labels can play a role in prompting people to quit smoking, and in educating people about the health effects of smoking.



This could lead to enormous benefits by reducing health care costs and hospitalisations. Even with a modest decrease in smoking there could be substantial cost savings.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community employs a Tobacco Control Adviser who provides technical assistance to pacific countries and territories to develop their tobacco control programmes. If you would like further information please contact Jeanie McKenzie at [JeanieM@spc.int](mailto:JeanieM@spc.int).

