

1. Global Report on Trends in Prevalence of Tobacco Use

The WHO Global Report on Trends in Prevalence of Tobacco Use 2000–2024 and projections 2025–2030 presents estimate of tobacco use prevalence among the population aged 15 years and older from 2000–2024, with trends projected to 2030.

Global Trends in Tobacco Use

Steady Decline in Tobacco Use – The global adult tobacco use rate decreased significantly from 26.2% in 2010 to 19.5% in 2024, reflecting policy success under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The decline is more pronounced in high-income countries, where awareness campaigns, taxation, and restrictions have been more stringent.

Persistent Global Concern – Despite progress, 1 in every 5 adults globally still uses tobacco in some form. Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) account for over 80% of global tobacco users, highlighting socio-economic and policy disparities.

E-Cigarette and Novel Product Rise – The number of e-cigarette users has crossed 100 million worldwide, showing a sharp rise among youth and urban populations. While some claim e-cigarettes as harm-reduction tools, WHO warns of dual use, addiction potential, and insufficient long-term safety data. The emergence of heated tobacco products (HTPs) and nicotine pouches adds regulatory complexity, especially in developing nations with weak enforcement.

Health and Economic Impact – Tobacco use causes over 8 million deaths annually, including 1.3 million from second-hand smoke exposure. The global economic cost of tobacco-related illnesses and productivity losses exceeds US\$ 1.4 trillion annually.

India's Tobacco Use and Global Standing

Prevalence and Magnitude (2024) – Approximately 243.48 million Indians aged 15 years and above use tobacco in some form (smoking or smokeless). Smokeless tobacco (gutkha, khaini, betel quid with tobacco) remains more prevalent than smoking in India, especially in rural areas.

Global Position – India ranks as the 2nd largest tobacco producer globally after China, producing both flue-cured Virginia (FCV) and non-FCV varieties. It is also the 2nd largest exporter after Brazil, supplying to about 100 countries.

Reduction Achievements – India is on track to achieve a 43% reduction in tobacco use (2010–2025), surpassing the WHO Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) target of 30%. National surveys such as GATS (Global Adult Tobacco Survey) and NFHS (National Family Health Survey) indicate a consistent downward trend in both smoking and smokeless forms.

Demographic Pattern – Tobacco use is higher among men (42%) than women (14%) and more prevalent in rural areas. States such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha report higher consumption, while Delhi and Kerala show lower rates.

India's Policy Measures to Curb Tobacco Consumption

Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003 – Prohibits smoking in public places (restaurants, transport, workplaces). Bans direct and indirect advertising, including brand promotion. Restricts sales to minors (below 18 years) and within 100 yards of educational institutions. Mandates pictorial health warnings covering 85% of packaging, among the largest globally.

Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019 – Completely bans production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, and advertisement of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). A preventive step to stop youth addiction and unregulated nicotine exposure.

National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), 2007–08 – Implements awareness campaigns, capacity building, school interventions, and cessation support through Tobacco Cessation Centres (TCCs). Operates in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and aligns with WHO-FCTC objectives.

Tobacco-Free Film and Television Rules (2024) – Updated regulations mandate clear anti-tobacco disclaimers, health spots, and warnings for any tobacco depiction in media. Ensures youth are not indirectly influenced through entertainment content.

Yellow Line Campaign – Introduced visible yellow boundary lines around schools, marking a 100-yard “no tobacco sale” zone. Promotes community monitoring and awareness, especially in urban clusters.

Fiscal Measures – Taxation and Pricing – Excise and GST duties on tobacco products have been gradually increased to discourage use. Experts suggest higher taxes on bidis and smokeless tobacco, which remain relatively cheaper compared to cigarettes. Revenue from these taxes contributes to public health and awareness initiatives.

About Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*)

Botanical Profile – Belongs to the Solanaceae family (nightshade family). It is an annual herbaceous plant grown mainly for its leaves used in cigarettes, cigars, bidis, and chewing products.

Origin and Cultivation Conditions – Native to tropical and subtropical regions of South America, now cultivated in Asia, Africa, and North America. Requires a frost-free growing season of 90–120 days, with 20°C–30°C optimal temperature and 500 mm or more of rainfall. Prefers well-drained sandy loam or alluvial soils with good organic content and irrigation support.

Nicotine Content and Characteristics – All parts (except seeds) contain nicotine (2–8%), a highly addictive alkaloid. About 64% of total plant nicotine is concentrated in the leaves. Nicotine acts as a stimulant affecting the central nervous system, leading to dependence.

Tobacco in India's Economy – Provides livelihood to about 36 million people, including farmers and workers in processing industries. However, health costs far outweigh economic benefits, with India facing an annual loss of over ₹1.8 lakh crore due to tobacco-related diseases and productivity loss.

Way Forward

Comprehensive Tax Reform – Introduce a uniform, high tax regime across all tobacco products.

Stronger Enforcement – Tighten monitoring of advertising bans and e-cigarette violations.

Cessation Support – Expand tobacco cessation services under Ayushman Bharat and tele-counselling programs.

Youth Engagement – Integrate anti-tobacco messages into school curricula and digital media.

Alternative Livelihoods – Promote crop diversification for tobacco farmers under sustainable agriculture initiatives.

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