



Message from

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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

on the occasion of

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY

31 May 2016

On this World No Tobacco Day, we focus on packaging of tobacco products. Many countries already have some form of packaging and labelling policy in place – whether in text or picture form. As the next step, WHO recommends adopting plain packaging. Plain packaging is a policy that is applicable to all tobacco products, whether they are smoked or smokeless products. It is also a recommendation of the guidelines for implementation of Articles 11 and 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the world’s first ever public health treaty.

What is plain packaging?

When you think of the word “plain”, you might automatically assume that the tobacco package displays no content whatsoever. In fact, a plain package does display content but not in the traditional sense. Simply put, a plain package does not have any of the features that make up a traditional tobacco product package, such as colours, trademarks and logos.

According to the guidelines for implementation of Articles 11 and 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, a plain package is one that restricts or prohibits the use of logos, colours, brand images or promotional information. It only carries the brand and product names on the package, using a standard colour and font style, such as black and white or two other contrasting colours. The only information which is included on this type of packaging are health warnings, tax stamps and other government mandated information or markings.

Why is plain packaging recommended?

Around the world, plain packaging – together with other measures, such as higher taxes, advertising bans, and smoke-free policies – has been shown to be an effective public health intervention to reduce the demand for tobacco. For years, the tobacco industry has made use of the “glamour” of the tobacco package to entice children and young people to use tobacco.

Every year, nearly 6 million people worldwide die from tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 38% of men and 4% of women (21% of adults on average) smoke tobacco. In some of our countries, however, the proportion of smokers is as high as 52% among men and 22% among women. Smoking rates among young people are particularly worrying: in some countries as high as 42% among boys and 31% among girls. This includes smoking *shisha*, which is more popular among young people than cigarettes, and no less dangerous.

Plain packaging is one of the important measures that will contribute to reducing the demand for tobacco, in addition to reducing the attractiveness of tobacco products and restricting use of the package as a form of advertising and promotion. It will also limit the use of misleading packaging and labelling by the tobacco industry, increase the effectiveness of health warnings and so help to reduce demand. However, it is imperative to remember that no single measure for tobacco control works alone. Countries need a comprehensive approach, including policies on labelling and packaging of tobacco products, to reduce the demand for tobacco and its impact on health.

On this World No Tobacco Day, 31 May, policy-makers, civil society and the public can take action to ensure that their governments work towards exploring the possibilities of plain packaging. Recognizing the importance of policies related to packaging and labelling in reducing the demand for tobacco, 12 countries in the Region are already implementing pictorial health warnings.

The next step in packaging and labeling, for many countries, is plain packaging.