

## / TOBACCO CONTROL

# Ban on sale of small cigarette packs from 1st Oct

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The ban on sale of small cigarette packs, clamped through a Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO), which takes effect on October 1, 2010, is being seen as a major stride forward in dissuading youth from tobacco use. If implemented in letter and spirit by manufacturers and retailers, the measure will prove significant in arresting the growing trend of smoking among youth.

Talking to 'The News', Director General Tobacco Control Yusuf Khan explained that the new SRO comprises two parts; the first deals with cigarette manufacturers and importers while the second is aimed at cigarette sellers or retailers.

According to the first part of SRO-863, all cigarette packs being manufactured by cigarette companies in Pakistan will be sold in packets of 20 cigarettes with effect from October 1, 2011. The sale of small packets containing 10, 5 or even three cigarettes will be

illegal after this date, he said. "This is because it is much more affordable for youth and persons belonging to the poorer segments of the society to buy smaller packs of cigarettes rather than packs of 20 or more cigarettes," he said. Yusuf Khan elaborated that youth and the poor are two segments that need to be protected most from falling into the habit of smoking.

The SRO further stipulates that cigarette packs imported for consumption in Pakistan will not be cleared from the port of entry unless they are in a packet of at least 20 cigarettes. A period of one year has been granted to cigarette manufacturers and importers to adjust their manufacturing and business systems according to the new requirements of the Ministry of Health.

In addition, local manufacturers and importers will have to ensure that each cigarette pack, whether manufactured in Pakistan or imported for con-

sumption in Pakistan, should have legibly printed on the side panel, in Urdu: "Sale to Persons under 18 Years of Age is Prohibited: Ministry of Health, Government of Pakistan." SRO-863 also prohibits the sale of sweets, snacks or toys in the form of cigarettes that may appeal to any person under the age of 18.

According to the second part of the SRO, which that deals with responsibilities of retailers or sellers, it shall be the duty of every seller of cigarettes to ensure, within his premises, that neither a person under the age of 18 years is permitted to sell or offer for sale cigarettes, nor should the same be sold to customers who under 18 years of age. Every seller will clearly and prominently display an A-4 size warning prescribed by the Ministry of Health saying, "Sale of cigarettes to persons under the age of 18 years is prohibited by law." In case of doubt about the age of the customer, it shall

be the duty of the seller of cigarettes to ask the customer to provide evidence, which may be in the form of the national identity card, to prove that he or she has reached the age of 18 years.

Section-8 of the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers Health Ordinance, 2002 already stipulates that no person will be allowed to sell tobacco products to any person under the age of 18. The enforcement of this section of law has remained weak so far. The Ministry of Health has now issued SRO-863 to frame rules for the implementation of this section of law.

Even though this SRO will come into force on October 1, 2011, the fact that it is illegal to sell tobacco products to persons less than 18 years of age is enforceable even today. Section-8 of the 2002 Ordinance does not only cover prohibition of sale of cigarettes to minors under 18, but also covers sale of other tobacco products like Sheesha, etc.

When contacted, a spokesman of the Ministry of Health said since tobacco use is a major cause of non-communicable diseases and youth are the most vulnerable segment being targeted by the tobacco industry, the government had announced that the focus of tobacco control efforts in the coming months will be on effective enforcement of existing tobacco control laws, particularly the Cigarettes (Printing of Warning) Ordinance 1979 and the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers' Health Ordinance, 2002. The latter law dating back to 2002, already legalises sales of tobacco products to children under 18. In its endeavour to effectively enforce this existing law, the Ministry of Health has issued the new SRO regarding sale of small packs and responsibilities of sellers.

The spokesman added that as the number of cigarettes contained in cigarette packets

increases to 20 cigarettes or more, the ministry hopes to enforce the requirement of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, an international treaty that Pakistan signed in 2004, that sale of single cigarette sticks in loose form will also be banned. The SRO-863 is a step in this direction.

An estimated 1200 young Pakistanis under the age of 18 years smoke their first cigarette before they turn 18, despite the legal ban on sale of cigarettes to minors. "The Ministry of Health recognises that tobacco companies want to aggressively market and recruit the youth of Pakistan as 'replacement smokers' and future customers, as 100,000 of their older customers die of tobacco-related illnesses every year in Pakistan. We intend to reverse this trend," the spokesman said.

The efforts of the Ministry of Health to enforce tobacco control laws and initiatives to increase awareness about the health hazards of smoking and second-hand tobacco smoke have been gathering pace since the past two years.