



Pictorial health warnings on tobacco packs

Why place pictorial warnings on packaging of tobacco products?

Is it a legal obligation?

Yes, it is. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) states in Article 11 that:

"Each Party shall, within a period of three years after entry into force of this Convention for that Party, adopt and implement, in accordance with its national law, effective measures to ensure that:

- (a) tobacco product packaging and labelling do not promote a tobacco product by any means that are false, misleading, deceptive or likely to create an erroneous impression about its characteristics, health effects, hazards or emissions,; and
- (b) Each unit packet and package of tobacco products and any outside packaging and labelling of such products also carry health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use, and may include other appropriate messages.....".

The specification of the health warnings and packaging and labelling were included in detail in Article 11 and the guidelines for Article 11 adopted by the Conference of Parties.

Impact of pictorial health warnings on tobacco users

Health warnings on tobacco packages increase smokers' knowledge of the risks associated with using tobacco in all its forms. Including pictures in health warnings to show the effects of diseases and information associated with tobacco use has proven to be a very effective tool for increasing the knowledge and affecting the attitudes of smokers in comparison with 100% textual warnings. Combining text and pictures in health warnings has been successful in passing on the message to illiterate groups. In many countries of the world, such as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Thailand and other countries experience shows that "strong pictorial warnings on tobacco packages, are an important information source for younger smokers and also for people in countries with low literacy rates. Pictures are also effective in conveying messages to children – especially the children of tobacco users, who are the most likely to start using tobacco themselves".

As stated in the FCTC guidelines:

"evidence shows that, when compared with text-only health warnings and messages, those with pictures:

- are more likely to be noticed;
- are rated more effective by tobacco users;
- are more likely to remain salient over time;
- better communicate the health risks of tobacco use;
- provoke more thought about the health risks of tobacco use and about cessation;
- increase motivation and intention to quit; and
- are associated with more attempts to quit".

What is a pack of tobacco?

The importance of tobacco packet health warnings cannot be understood without looking into the way the industry uses the packaging; the packet for the industry is the moving advertising, the message it sends away with each smoker, expressing not only a brand, but more important, a lifestyle.



Bearing that in mind, it is very important for countries to implement pictorial health warnings not only as part of their WHO FCTC-related obligations but also as a strategy to strip away tobacco's false attractive image, expose its deadly impact on health and its harmful effects on other aspects of human life, such as its impact on national economies. Pictorial health warnings are the most cost-effective tool for anti-tobacco advertising; you are addressing smokers and non-smokers twenty-four a day, seven days a week everywhere with the packet.

Pictorial health warnings in the Region

Many countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region have plans to implement pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets and Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan and Pakistan already do. However, the sizes and specifications of these warnings vary from one country to the other although all have the following common elements.

- All warnings are textual and pictorial.
- The size of all warnings varies between 30% and 50% of both sides of the pack.
- Warnings are rotated.
- Many warnings are used.
- All warnings are in national languages.
- Packaging and labelling laws do not allow for the use of misleading messages.

Countries of the Region implementing pictorial health warnings have all noted some common challenges.

- There are no production specifications for the packets used in the market; the industry took advantage of this. In some countries, they tried to change the regular size of the packet to dilute the health warning.
- Pictorial health warnings are not applied on all tobacco products in all countries, for example, tobacco used in *shisha* is not included in the new pictorial health warning system in most of the countries mentioned above. This has to be addressed through innovative mechanisms.
- The implementation of pictorial health warnings did not cancel out the existence of text-only warnings in all countries.
- The future of pictorial health warnings is unclear and no countries have introduced plain packaging as yet.

How to implement pictorial health warnings

Providing that the national authority is "onboard", there are many steps to take before actually putting pictorial health warnings on the packaging of tobacco products. These preparatory steps are shown in Figure 1.

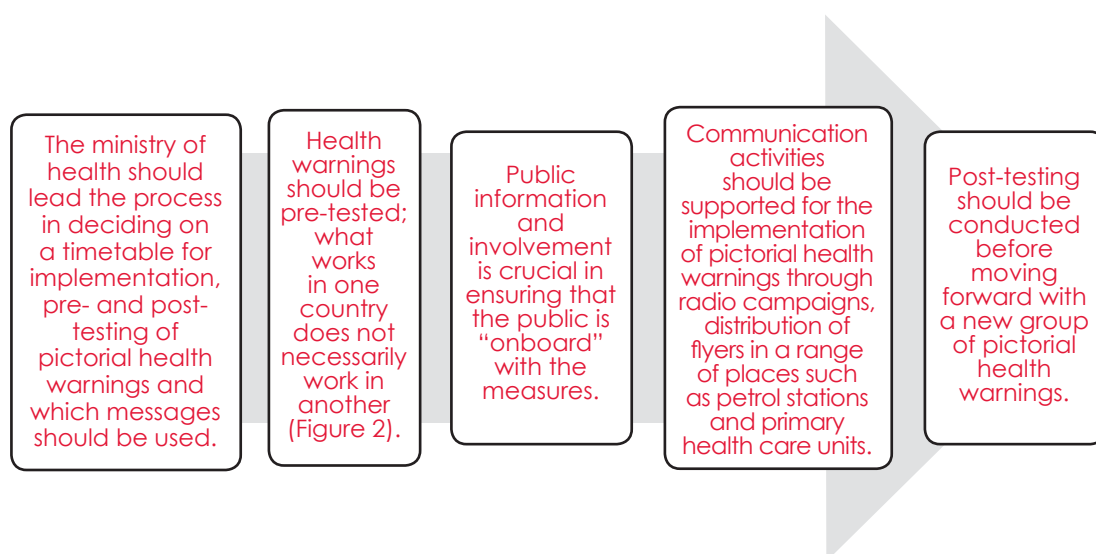


Figure 1. Steps to be taken before putting pictorial health warnings on the packaging of tobacco products

Technical criteria for pictorial health warnings mean that these warnings must be:

- applied on all tobacco products packs irrelevant of the brand or type.
- placed on both the front and back (or on all main faces if there are more than two) of each unit packet and package.
- displayed on principal display areas and, in particular, at the top of the principal display areas rather than at the bottom to increase visibility.
- displayed in such a way that the regular opening of the package does not permanently damage or conceal the text or image of the health warning.
- displayed to cover more than 50% of the principal display areas and aim to cover as much of the principal display areas as possible.
- full colour (four colour printing), rather than black and white, for pictorial elements of health warnings and messages.
- rotational, this can be implemented by having multiple health warnings and messages appearing concurrently or by setting a date after which the health warning and message content will change.
- clearly specified by Parties; the number of health warnings and messages that are to appear concurrently must be clearly indicated. Do not leave it to the industry's choice.
- void of misleading terms, such as "low tar", "light", "ultra-light" or "mild", "extra", "ultra" and numbering of brands, or colouring that is used to indicate a difference in contents, these are all misleading strategies.
- borne by the tobacco industry in terms of the cost of producing and placing the health warnings on tobacco packs.

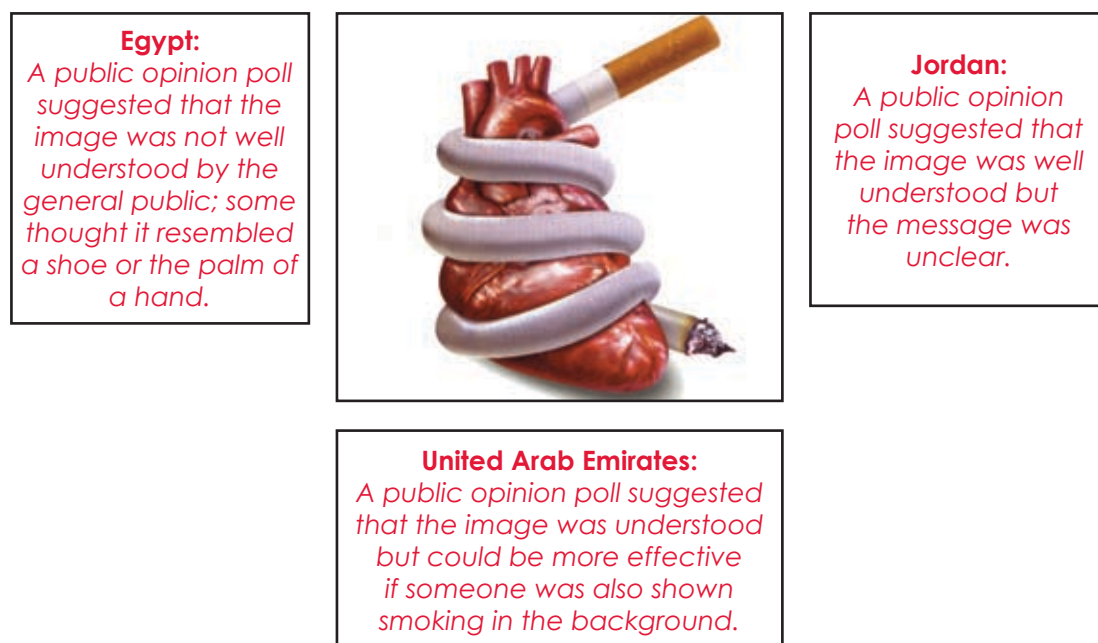


Figure 2. Consider further health warnings and messages on all sides of a package, as well as on package inserts and onserts