

gulfnnews.com

In Focus | Anti-smoking Campaign

Call for tough standards on sale of sheesha tobacco

loading
Close [x]

Health expert wants warning on packets and need for testing and standards on tobacco products

By Samihah Zaman, Staff Reporter

Published: 00:00 June 28, 2011

GULF NEWS

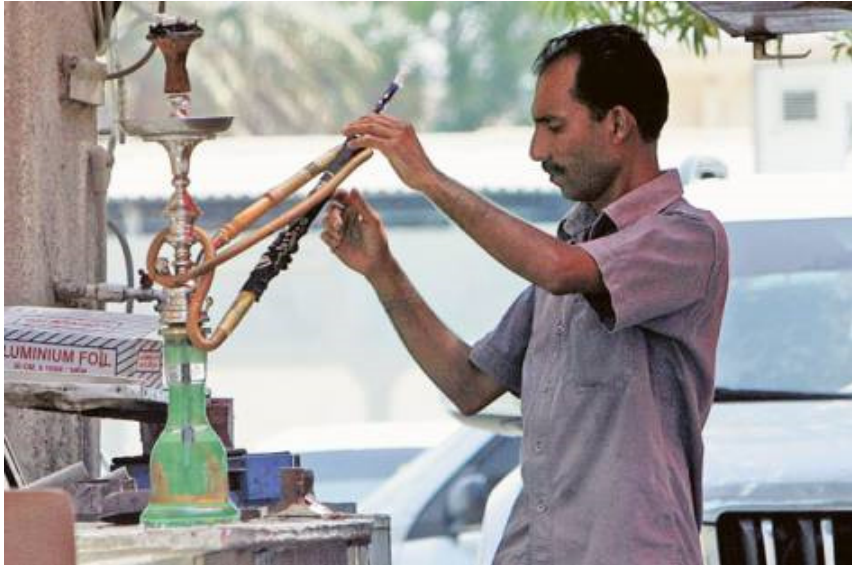


Image Credit: Pankaj
Sharma/Gulf News

An employee of a cafe prepares sheesha. Image for illustrative purpose only.

Abu Dhabi: Because of increased tobacco use among youth in the UAE, there is an urgent need to introduce standards on the sale of products like sheesha tobacco and loose tobacco for the midwakh (pipe), a leading health official here has said.

These standards should include a mandatory health warning on tobacco packaging, as well as testing of contents before the tobacco products are put on sale, Dr Widad Al Maidour, head of national tobacco control committee at the Ministry of Health, told Gulf News.

"The sale of cigarettes in the UAE is governed by the Emirates Authority for Standardisation and Metrology (ESMA), and the amounts of nicotine and tar are checked before the cigarettes are put on sale.

However, no testing is carried out before loose tobacco and sheesha tobacco are sold, and the packages also do not contain any health warnings," Dr Widad said.

Preference

According to the official, youngsters in the region are known to prefer midwakh and sheesha to cigarettes, especially because of the easier availability, frequent positive portrayal on TV, and lack of standards on the sale of these tobacco products.

In the UAE, tobacco for both is sold in packages that do not include health warnings about the risk of tobacco use. Cigarette packages, on the other hand, are required to include clear health warnings in both English and Arabic, based on ESMA standards.

"In addition, the lack of testing on the sheesha tobacco means that the amount of glycerine and sugar in it cannot be controlled, and neither can the amount of pesticide that is usually present in loose tobacco for midwakh. While tobacco products are always harmful, the absence of testing makes them even more harmful for people," Dr Widad explained.

Campaign

The official added that a two-month health awareness campaign to warn youngsters about the risks of all tobacco use will be rolled out across the country in September.

While current statistics about the use of tobacco among UAE youth were not immediately available, Dr Widad said that a study conducted in 2005 had found that 28 per cent of youngsters between 10 and 16 years of age regularly used tobacco products.

"We expect this number to have increased by now, especially the proportion of female youngsters who smoke regularly, mainly because smoking is often portrayed as being 'cool' on most television shows.

"The Ministry of Health is therefore working on a survey to ascertain how many youth smoke regularly, and these results should be available by the end of next year," she said.