

HEALTH WARNING MESSAGES ON PACKS



Article 11: Each unit packet and package of tobacco products and any outside packaging and labelling of such products shall carry health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use, and may include other appropriate messages. These warnings and messages: (i) shall be approved by the competent national authority; (ii) shall be rotating; (iii) shall be large, clear, visible and legible; (iv) should be 50% or more of the principal display areas but shall be no less than 30% of the principal display area; (v) may be in the form of or include pictures or pictograms.

WHY ARE HEALTH WARNINGS ON PACKAGES EFFECTIVE?

Health warnings on cigarette packages are among the most prominent sources of health information: more smokers report getting information about the risks of smoking from packages than any other source except television.¹ Health warnings are an extremely **cost-effective** public health intervention and have tremendous reach. Pack-a-day smokers are potentially exposed to the warnings over 7,000 times per year. Non-smokers, including **children** and **youth**, also report high exposure and awareness of health warnings on packages.²

HOW CAN WE INCREASE THE IMPACT OF HEALTH WARNINGS?

The **size** and **position** of health warnings are critical to their effectiveness. Obscure health warnings on the side of packages have little impact. Large warnings located on the top portion of the principal display areas are considerably more likely to be noticed and recalled.^{3,4}

Health communications must be regularly updated in order to maintain their effectiveness over time. Health warnings should be updated every two years to maximize their impact.⁴ Linking public health campaigns (such as those involving mass media) to health warnings can provide effective reinforcement for both.³



ARE PICTURE WARNINGS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN TEXT-ONLY WARNINGS?

Yes. Pictures increase the salience and vividness of health communications, and are consistently rated by smokers to be more effective and engaging than text-only warnings.^{5,6,7} Picture warnings are associated with greater health knowledge, perceptions of risk, motivation to quit, and cessation behaviour.^{1,3-8}



Picture warnings appear to be especially effective among youth: more than 90% of Canadian youth agree that picture warnings on Canadian packages: have provided them with important information about the health effects of smoking cigarettes, are accurate, and make smoking seem less attractive.²

Picture warnings are essential for reaching smokers with low education and literacy, and may help to reduce disparities in health knowledge. Pictures are also important in countries where multiple languages are common.

ARE FRIGHTENING PICTURES OF DISEASE EFFECTIVE?

Yes. Pictures that arouse emotion through “graphic” depictions of health risks are most likely to be recalled and rated as effective by smokers.^{5,6,8} Pictures that do not include frightening health information fail to communicate the real health effects of smoking in an **honest** and straightforward way. There is **no evidence** to date that graphic warnings are associated with “adverse” outcomes, such as increases in smoking or decreases in credibility of the information.



Supportive “efficacy” information that provides encouragement and concrete information on how to quit smoking should accompany graphic pictures. This is strongly indicated both theoretically and by past research in effective health communication.⁹

Health warnings that include information on cessation services – such as a toll-free telephone “quitline” number – have a significant impact on the use of these services and represent a low-cost method of promoting cessation and supporting smokers’ efforts to change.¹⁰

DOES THE PUBLIC SUPPORT LARGE PICTURE

Yes, there is strong public support for picture warnings, smokers themselves. Most smokers would like to see information on their packages, including smokers living in have large picture warnings, such as Canada, Thailand,

SUMMARY

- ⊙ Large pictorial warnings are an effective way of risks to smokers.
- ⊙ Warnings that combine graphic pictures of disease with information are most effective.
- ⊙ Large picture warnings are credible and receive strong and non-smokers.



WARNINGS?

including among **more** health countries that already and Uruguay.^{11,12}

communicating health supportive quitting support from smokers

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