



KILLER TOBACCO LOSING GROUND, BUT MILLIONS STILL THREATENED

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Despite the COVID-19 pandemic creating havoc worldwide, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has good news in public health. Its Global Tobacco Epidemic 2021 report says progress is being made in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”.

The report—fourth in a series since 2015—released on November 16, says that 146 countries have at least one effective tobacco demand-reduction measure in place at the highest level, under the WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013–2020.

This report shows 150 countries are seeing rates of tobacco use decline, with 60 of these countries on track to achieve the ambitious voluntary reduction target of a 30 per cent by 2025. It’s an increase from two years ago, when only 32 countries were on course.

DROP IN TOBACCO USERS

Concretely: The number of tobacco users continues to decrease globally, going from 1.32 billion in 2015 to 1.30 billion in 2020 and that number is expected to continue to drop to 1.27 billion by 2025.

WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus says, the numbers are very encouraging, but more work must be done. “We still have a long way to go, and tobacco companies will continue to use every trick in the book to defend the gigantic profits they make from peddling their deadly wares”, Tedros said.

According to WHO, recent evidence shows that the tobacco industry used the COVID-19 pandemic to build influence with Governments in 80 States. The report urges Member States to accelerate implementation of the measures outlined in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Ruediger Krech, Director of WHO Department of Health Promotion, attributed some of the progress to measures aligned with the WHO FCTC, while maintaining that success is “fragile”. He said: “It is clear that tobacco control is effective, and we have a moral obligation to our people to move aggressively in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

A newly released WHO Global Investment Case for Tobacco Cessation, also makes the case for investing in cessation interventions. According to the report, contributing US\$ 1.68 per capita each year to national toll-free quit lines, SMS-based support, and other interventions could help 152 million tobacco users successfully quit by 2030.

The report and the investment case were released right after the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

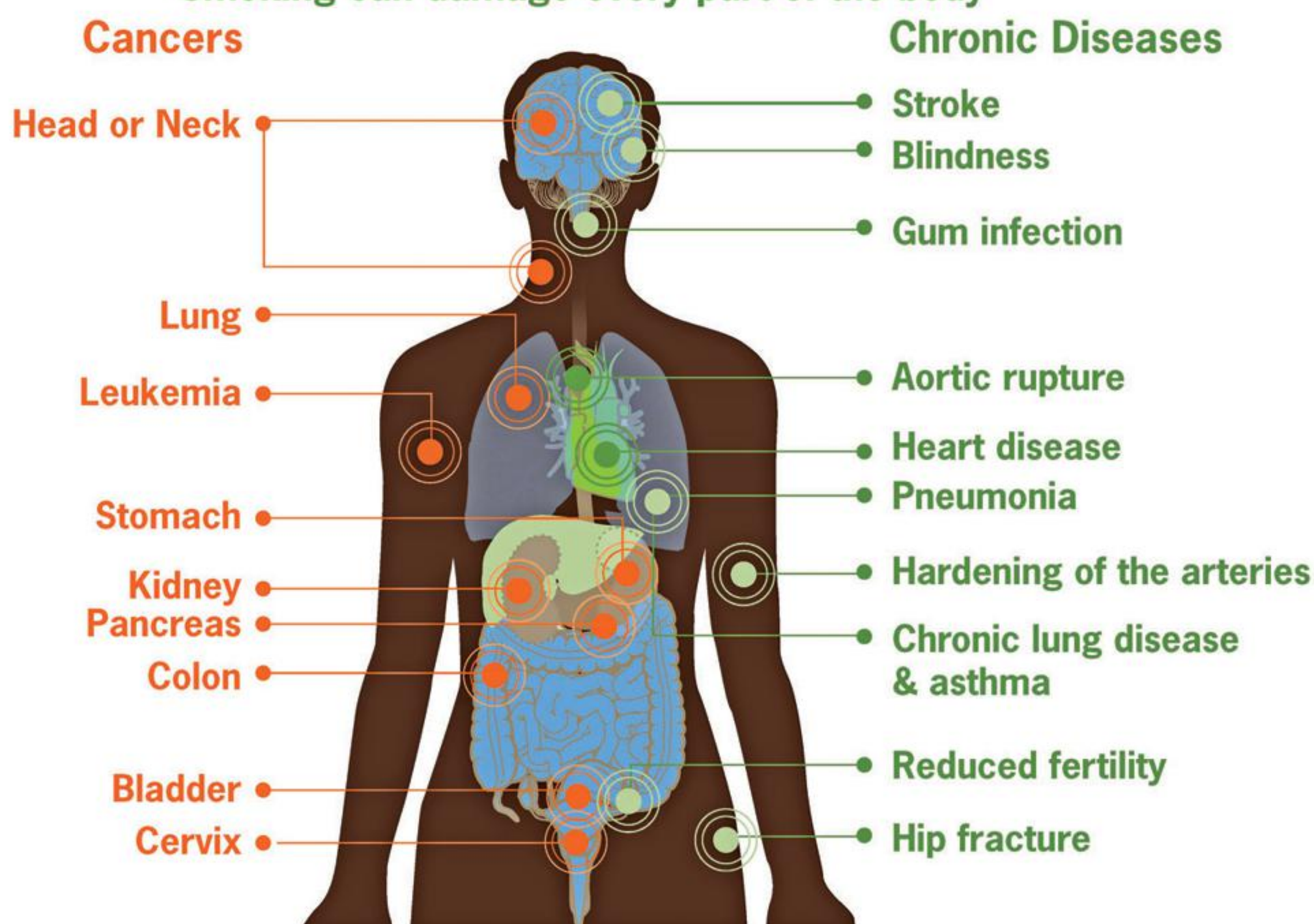
Among the key findings of the report is that last year, 22.3 per cent of the global population used tobacco, 36.7 per cent of all men and 7.8 per cent of the world’s women. About 38 million children between the ages of 13 and 15 currently use tobacco, 13 million girls and 25 million boys.

While it is illegal for minors to purchase it, the goal is to achieve zero child tobacco users.

On average, upper middle-income coun-

Risks from Smoking

Smoking can damage every part of the body



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tries are making the slowest progress, but with data quality low or insufficient in 29 countries, more monitoring is needed to assess a trend. According to WHO, tobacco kills up to half of its users, claiming more than 8 million lives each year.

WHO REPORT

The WHO global trend report points out that of all WHO regions, the steepest decline is in the Ameri-

cas, where the average user rate dropped from 21 per cent in 2010 to 16 per cent last year.

In Africa, the rate fell from 15 per cent to 10 per cent and the continent continues to have the lowest numbers.

In Europe, 18 per cent of women still use tobacco, substantially more than in any other WHO region, while all others are on track to reduce women’s usage rates by at least 30 per cent by 2025.

Although South-East Asia has the highest rates, with around 432 million users or 29 per cent of its population, it is also the region in which the numbers are declining fastest.

The report notes that the Western Pacific is projected to become the region with the highest use among men, with indications showing that more than 45 per cent will still be using tobacco in 2025.

According to WHO, tobacco kills more than eight million people each year, over seven million of whom die as a direct result of smoking tobacco while around 1.2 million others from second-hand smoke.

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