

Up in smoke: Indonesian child-teen smokers rising

May 21 2010, By NINIEK KARMINI , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Ardi Rizal, 2, throws a tantrum when his parents refuse him a cigarette. His father gave him his first when he was just 18 months old.

The smoking toddler was witnessed by a reporter who recently visited his home in the fishing village of Musi Banyuasin, in Indonesia's South Sumatra province.

"I'm not worried about his health, he looks healthy," shrugged the boy's father Mohammad Rizal. "He cries and throws tantrums when we don't let him smoke. He's addicted."

Ardi's youth is the extreme of a disturbing trend. Data from the Central Statistics Agency showed 25 percent of Indonesian children aged 3 to 15 have tried cigarettes, with 3.2 percent of those active smokers.

The percentage of 5- to 9-year-olds lighting up increased from 0.4 percent in 2001 to 2.8 percent in 2004, the agency reported.

A video of a 4-year-old Indonesian boy blowing smoke rings appeared briefly on YouTube in March, prompting outrage before it was removed from the site.

Child advocates are speaking out about the health damage to children from secondhand smoke, and the growing pressure on them to pick up a cigarette in a country where one-third of the population uses tobacco and single cigarettes can be bought for a few cents.

Seto Mulyadi, chairman of Indonesia's child protection commission, blames the increase on aggressive advertising and parents who are smokers.

"A law to protect children and passive smokers should be introduced immediately in this country," he said.

A health law passed in 2009 formally recognizes that smoking is addictive, and an anti-smoking coalition is pushing for tighter restrictions on smoking in public places, advertising bans and bigger health warnings on cigarette packages.

But a bill on tobacco control has been stalled because of opposition from the tobacco industry. The bill would ban cigarette advertising and sponsorship, prohibit smoking in public, and add graphic images to packaging.

Benny Wahyudi, a senior official at the Industry Ministry, said the government had initiated a plan to try to limit the number of smokers, including dropping production to 240 billion cigarettes this year, from 245 billion in 2009.

"The government is aware of the impact of smoking on health and has taken efforts, including lowering cigarette production, increasing its tax and limiting smoking areas," he said.

Mulyadi said a ban on advertising is key to putting the brakes on child and teen smoking. "If cigarette advertising is not banned, there will be more kids whose lives are threatened because of smoking," he said.

Ubiquitous advertising hit a bump last month when a cigarette company was forced to withdraw its sponsorship of pop star Kelly Clarkson's concert following protests from fans and anti-tobacco groups.

However, imposing a nonsmoking message will be difficult in Indonesia, the world's third-largest tobacco consumer.

Tubagus Haryo Karbyanto, a member of the National Commission of Tobacco Control, said Indonesia must also address the social conditions that lead to smoking, such as family influence and peer pressure.

"The promotion of health has to be integrated down to the smallest units in our society, from public health centers and local health care centers to the family," he was quoted as saying by the Jakarta Globe on Friday.

Health Minister Endang Sedyaningsih conceded turning young people off smoking will be difficult in a country where it is perceived as positive because cigarette companies sponsor everything from scholarships to sporting events.

"This is the challenge we face in protecting youth from the dangers of [smoking](#)," she said in a statement on the ministry's website.

©2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Up in smoke: Indonesian child-teen smokers rising (2010, May 21) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-05-indonesian-child-teen-smokers.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--