Medical Xpress

Cigarette health warnings push smokers to quit: study

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Warnings on cigarette packets about the dangers of tobacco push smokers to kick the habit, and graphic images depicting human suffering are the most effective, a study released Thursday shows.

Nearly all adult smokers in countries where a World Health Organization (WHO) convention requires health warnings on tobacco products noticed the warnings, and more than half of smokers in six of 14 countries in the study said the warnings made them think about quitting, says the study.

In the remaining eight countries, with the exception of Poland, more than one in four poll respondents said the warning labels prompted them to consider kicking the habit, the study published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says.

For the study, researchers analyzed data collected between 2008 and 2010 for smokers in Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay and Vietnam for a poll called the the Global Adult Tobacco Survey.

They found that warnings that are most likely to get someone to consider quitting stand out prominently on the package and use pictures or graphics to describe the harmful effects of smoking.

Graphic warnings not only reach smokers who either cannot read or do not read text-only warnings, but could also be better at evoking an emotional response from a smoker and motivating them to quit, the

CDC study says.

Brazil and Thailand both had "numerous prominent and graphic pictorial warnings in rotation" and also had some of the highest rates of smokers thinking about quitting because of the warnings, the study says.

But for reasons that are unclear, thinking about quitting was also high in Bangladesh and Vietnam, where warnings cover less of the package and were text-only, it says.

The CDC wants to see further research to try to find out how many smokers who think about quitting because of a warning on a packet actually do, and to determine what other factors come into play in getting someone to stop smoking.

According to the WHO, tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death, and is estimated to kill more than five million people a year worldwide, mostly in low- and middle-income countries.

Health warnings on tobacco product packages are considered by the WHO to be a key tool in combating the global tobacco epidemic, along with price hikes, smoke-free policies, and advertising and sponsorship bans.

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