

Russia to put shock images on cigarette packs (Update)

September 3 2012

Russia on Monday unveiled a series of graphic images, including of a gangrenous foot and a still-born baby, that will be printed on cigarette packs as the country tries to trim its sky-high rates of smoking.

The health ministry published photographs on its website for use by cigarette companies, which will be obliged to print them on cigarette packs from May next year as Russia tightens its laws towards a Western-style crackdown on smoking.

The pictures show a blue-tinted image of a dead baby and a graphic image of a blackened gangrenous foot, as well as more figurative images such as a woman's hand making a "thumbs-down" gesture to represent impotency.

"Global experience shows that shocking pictures on cigarette packs significantly influenced changes in perception of smoking by smokers themselves," the ministry said.

The average Russian smoker consumes 17 cigarettes per day, with men smoking an average of 18 cigarettes and women 13, the health ministry said, citing the World Health Organisation's Global Adult Tobacco Survey statistics.

The survey published in 2009 found that 39.1 percent of Russians smoked, which the WHO said was one of the world's highest rates of tobacco use.

Deputy health minister Sergei Velmyaikin estimated that Russia lost almost 1.5 trillion rubles (\$46 billion) per year from tobacco-related deaths among people of working age, the Interfax news agency reported.

The WHO said that graphic warnings on packs would be a "major step forward in The Russian Federation to be compliant with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control."

Russia two years ago introduced large written warnings of the health consequences of smoking on packs, following Western practice.

On Friday, the health ministry submitted a draft bill to lawmakers that would introduce Western-style smoking bans in restaurants from 2014 in a country where non-smoking areas are still usually a token gesture.

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