

S.Korea parliament approves 80% hike in cigarette price

December 3 2014

South Korea's parliament has approved an 80 percent hike in cigarette prices aimed at cutting consumption in a nation with one of the world's highest male smoking rates.

The 2015 budget, which was adopted by the national assembly shortly before midnight on Tuesday, endorsed a government proposal to raise the average price of a packet of cigarettes from 2,500 won to 4,500 won from January 1.

Around 44 percent of adult South Korean men are smokers, the highest rate among member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development ahead of Turkey, Greece, Estonia and Japan.

The Health Ministry says it hopes the price rise will help cut that rate to 35 percent by the end of 2016.

The government has taken a series of anti-smoking measures, including a ban on lighting-up in public places.

The ministry also wants tobacco packaging to include pictures of the harm caused by smoking, and a ban on tobacco ads in retail stores.

Smoking and its impact on public health in South Korea has become a topic of heated public debate and litigation in recent years.

In April, the Supreme Court rejected a damages suit filed by 30 [lung cancer patients](#) against KT&G, which controls more than 60 percent of a tobacco market estimated to be worth more than \$9.0 billion a year.

State health insurers immediately filed a separate lawsuit against three domestic and foreign [tobacco](#) makers, seeking damages of 53.7 billion won for payouts over smoking-related illnesses.

The insurers claim to have spent about 1.7 trillion won each year in payouts for the treatment of conditions caused by smoking.

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