

India suspends plans for warnings on cigarette packets

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India has suspended plans for bigger health warnings on cigarette packets, the health minister told AFP on Tuesday, after a committee of lawmakers demanded local evidence that smoking causes cancer.

The government announced last year that [tobacco companies](#) would have to stamp warnings across most of the surface of packets from April 1, joining countries such as Australia and more recently Britain with tough packaging rules.

But Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda said the plans—for warnings and a picture of damage caused by smoking across 85 percent of packets—had now been delayed.

"We have put the order in abeyance as the parliamentary committee wants to deliberate on some issues. We stand by our commitment to introduce new picture warnings," he said, adding that its introduction would be "delayed a bit".

The move is a major setback for [health](#) activists who have been campaigning for an increase from the current 20 percent of packet surface which written warnings now cover.

A parliamentary panel, which is examining proposed legislative changes on the issue, asked the government this month to stall its plans, citing no Indian study linking smoking with cancer.

"There is no Indian survey report to prove that tobacco consumption leads to cancer. All the studies are done abroad," parliamentary panel head Dilip Gandhi told AFP.

Gandhi, a lawmaker from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said the panel did not "dispute the harmful effects of smoking but cannot copy paste studies conducted abroad".

He also warned that millions of farmers and others employed in India's tobacco industry would lose their jobs if cigarette sales dropped as a result of the new packaging.

Gandhi is from the southwestern state of Maharashtra, one of India's major tobacco-growing states.

Up to 900,000 Indians die every year from causes related to tobacco use, the government has said. India will record 1.5 million [tobacco](#)-related deaths annually by 2020, according to estimates by the International Tobacco Control Project.

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