

# Greece aims to cut smoking by a third by 2025: PM

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Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Tuesday launched an anti-smoking campaign that aims to cut the habit, which is still strong despite repeated crackdowns, by a third within six years.

"The Greek state...aims to reduce smoking by 30 percent by 2025," Mitsotakis told a conference on the issue on Tuesday.

"Our enemy is smoke, not smokers. Our aim is not division but an alliance on health," he said.

Smoking kills 20,000 Greeks every year, and results in 700,000 hospital stays annually at a cost of nearly one billion euros (\$1.1 billion), the PM said.

A study by the American College of Greece's Public Health Institute and the Hellenic Cancer Society in October found that the number of adults who smoke has declined from 40 percent to 27.5 percent in a decade.

But the PM warned Tuesday that an alarming number of minors smoke, including one in six 15-year-old boys and one in eight girls.

A law promoted last month by Mitsotakis' conservative government, which came to power in July, prescribes fines of up to 500 euros for smokers caught lighting up in a restaurant or club, and 10,000 euros for establishment owners.

Repeated violations could see establishments shut down temporarily and even have their licenses revoked.

Mitsotakis is a fervent non-smoker, and on Tuesday recounted an 1979 meeting with his grandfather as he lay dying of lung cancer.

"We did not know the harmful effects (of smoking). You do," he said his grandfather told him.

Anti-smoking laws in Greece date back to the mid-19th century. An 1856 royal decree issued by the country's first post-independence

monarch, king Otto of Bavaria, forbade the use of pipes and cigarettes in public offices and shops.

Another crackdown in 2009 was initially pursued energetically but later waned.

When the economic crisis hit Greece a year later, few could argue with business owners complaining that their livelihood depended on placating a paying majority of smoking patrons.

In 2017, a Eurobarometer study found that 78 percent of Greeks had encountered indoor smoking in restaurants, and 87 percent in bars.

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