

Heavy metals in Chinese cigarettes pose high risk: study

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A new international research project has found high levels of heavy metals in Chinese cigarettes, with some containing three times the level of lead, cadmium and arsenic of Canadian brands.

The International Tobacco Control Project, which brings together experts from 20 countries, released a series of 11 research studies that found China was endangering cigarette buyers at home and abroad by failing to implement stronger controls.

"All 13 Chinese cigarette brands tested were found to have significantly elevated levels of [heavy metals](#), with some containing about three times the level of lead, [cadmium](#), and arsenic compared to Canadian cigarette brands," the study, released on Thursday, found.

"The presence of high levels of heavy metals in Chinese cigarettes may constitute a potential global public health problem as exports of Chinese cigarettes continue to increase."

"It is fundamentally wrong that consumers in many countries know about the content of the chocolate bars they eat, but know nothing about what is in the cigarettes they smoke," the project quoted lead researcher Geoffrey Fong from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, as saying.

About a million smokers die each year in China from tobacco-related diseases and 100,000 people from exposure to second-hand smoke, the

project, published as a supplement to the journal Tobacco Control, found.

"If current trends continue, China's death toll from tobacco will reach two million per year by 2020," it said.

The project added that China was failing to educate people on the risks of smoking through measures such as effective warnings on packaging.

Health warnings on Chinese cigarette packets are often written in English rather than Chinese and lack graphic images showing the damage to health caused by smoking, it noted.

"Only 68 percent of current smokers in China believe that smoking leads to lung cancer and only 36 percent believe that smoking causes coronary heart disease."

Fong added: "These results demonstrate how far China needs to go in tobacco control.... Knowledge is low, misperceptions are high and unless stronger action is taken, China will soon find itself in the midst of an even more devastating public health disaster than they are experiencing now."

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