

WHO urges global governments to protect youth from nicotine addiction



Worldwide, at least 40 million children aged 13–15 use tobacco products, and young people's use of e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches continues to rise. In advance of World No Tobacco Day – 31 May – the World Health Organization (WHO) urges governments around the world to protect a new generation from becoming addicted to tobacco and nicotine products.

WHO warns that tobacco and nicotine companies are deliberately engineering their products to make them more appealing, easier to use and harder to quit, particularly for adolescents and young people.

Even as tobacco continues to kill millions of people, major tobacco companies are reinventing their business model, continuing to profit from deadly cigarettes while aggressively pushing flavoured e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches and other nicotine products aimed at hooking the next generation."

Dr. Etienne Krug, Director of the Department of Health Determinants, Promotion and Prevention at WHO.

Nicotine is highly addictive and harmful, especially at high concentrations, particularly for children, adolescents and young adults whose brains are still developing.

Governments can protect people by banning flavoured products, banning advertising, promotion and sponsorship, making indoor public places completely smoke- and vape-free and stepping up enforcement.

WHO recently warned that nicotine pouches, one of the fastest-growing nicotine products on the market, are being aggressively promoted through social media influencers, using lifestyle branding and flavours designed to appeal to young people.

The nicotine pouch report found that about 160 countries still have no specific regulations in place for nicotine pouches, despite rapidly growing sales worldwide, leaving millions of people unprotected. Bright packaging, candy-like flavours and influencer campaigns are the

same tactics used for other nicotine products, with the primary goal of creating addiction to these harmful products.

Governments and organizations making a difference

Governments at both national and local levels play a key role in the regulation of these products. One such example is the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which has emerged as a leading example of local action to counter the use of nicotine and protect young people from addiction. The city intensified enforcement against e-cigarette sales and advertising and carried out hundreds of coordinated inspections to ensure compliance with the ban and smoke- and vape-free laws. It also launched large-scale public awareness campaigns and strengthened smoke-free legislation to explicitly include all tobacco and nicotine products, including e-cigarettes.

On 19 May, WHO awarded leaders from around the world who are taking bold action to counter increasingly sophisticated industry tactics designed to attract young people. WHO recognizes all of the awardees of the 2026 World No Tobacco Day Awards for their outstanding contributions to tobacco control.

Tobacco use kills more than 7 million people every year. It remains one of the leading causes of preventable death globally and is linked to cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness and more than 20 different types or subtypes of cancer.

WHO encourages the world's more than 1 billion tobacco, e-cigarette and nicotine pouch users to take the first step toward quitting and break free from addiction on 31 May.

Source:

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