

Smokers face tighter restrictions

Tobacco control team expects enforcement by September

- By Mahmood Saberi, Senior Reporter
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Dubai: The anti-tobacco federal law which will strictly prohibit smoking in certain public places and make it more expensive, should be in place by September a senior official said Wednesday.

Dr Wedad Al Maidour, head of the tobacco control team, said a meeting was held Wednesday at the Ministry of Health to chalk out the draft laws.

"The first draft will be ready this month and the Minister will present it to the cabinet for approval," she said, adding that by September the law should be in full force.

The UAE, along with other GCC States is putting forward tough legislation to help control smoking, including hiking the cost of a pack of cigarettes to double the price. Presently, a pack costs about Dh 7.

"We are looking at Dh 14 to 15 (a pack)," said the doctor.

Tobacco companies are apparently unhappy over the decision that half of the package will be covered with graphics, highlighting the dangers of smoking and that 20 per cent of the pack should carry warnings.

"It does not matter they are unhappy," said the doctor, noting that a significant number of adult males in the UAE are afflicted with lung cancer.

"They have had to print the graphics and warning in Canada and Taiwan, why not in the GCC?"

When the law comes into force, smoking will be banned in and outside educational institutions, public transport, sports venues and houses of worship.

Unique to the UAE will be the prohibition of smoking in a car in the presence of children. "We are trying to protect people from second-hand smoke," she said.

Cooperation

Dr Hanif Hassan, Minister of Health, said after the first meeting that cooperation among social organisations was important to educate the young about the dangers of smoking.

"The UAE gives great concern to health policies and works on developing them according to the requirements and demands of modern times. Such policies would definitely have a direct impact on health practices, medical standards in order to raise the health sector and provide health care quality services".

Dr Mahmoud Fikri, executive director for Health Policies at the Ministry, pointed out that tobacco consumption in the Gulf region is an economic, social and health burden.

He also cited reasons as trade liberalisation, direct foreign investment and other factors such as global marketing, tobacco advertising and promotion, smuggled cigarettes for the increase of the tobacco 'pandemic'.

Cost could be doubled

A new federal law will double the price of cigarettes from Dh 7 to Dh 14 a pack. Half of the pack will be covered in graphics showing the dangers of smoking and 20 per cent of the pack will have a warning. Smoking in a car in the presence of a child will be banned.

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