

Govt wants online movie streaming cos to run anti-tobacco messages

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New Delhi: Cracking the whip on video streaming companies for violating anti-tobacco norms, the Health Ministry has asked Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to put a check on the contents provided by online movie broadcasting companies such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, etc.

The Health Ministry has objected that video streaming companies are flouting anti-tobacco norms by not running anti-tobacco messages during smoking scenes in movies and television programmes.

"Since, the Internet-based movie providing companies are governed by Telecom Ministry, the anti-tobacco agencies are finding it difficult to get the norms implemented," a Health Ministry official said, adding that in a bid to tap the viewership business through smartphones, which is on the rise in the country, the video streaming companies are also coming up with their attractive movie packages.

"As per the extant rule, all films and TV programmes, including films shown on TV programmes, have to run anti-tobacco message clips of minimum 30 seconds at the beginning of the film or the television programme, which is being not followed by video streaming companies such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, Jio, Voot, Hungama, etc," a health ministry letter said.

"The norms meant to discourage people from using tobacco products are being fairly well implemented in films screened in movie theatres, but the same is being not implemented by internet-based movie streaming companies. They are not running scrolls such as tobacco products are injurious to health" the letter read. Urging telecom regulator to tighten the norms, the Health Ministry has asked TRAI to issue an advisory to all concerned for compliance of the above rules.

Commenting the move, DS Meena, a doctor at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, said, "Tobacco is the prime cause of deaths due to heart attacks and cancer. Consumption of tobacco products is responsible for about 40 per cent deaths due to cancer and cardiovascular diseases."

"As the internet has become a part of our day-to-day life, youth prefer to watch movies and other video content on their smartphones only and when there are no anti-tobacco messages being run during the smoking scenes in movies, it's a possibility that youth would get encouraged following what is being shown in movies. The video streaming companies must be strictly told to obey the anti-tobacco norms," Meena said.