

Govt Plans to Raise Smoking Age to 21, Ban Loose Cigarettes Sale

 The government plans to increase the smoking age from 18 to 21 years, ban sale of loose cigarettes, do away with designated smoking rooms at airports and restaurants, and increase penalties for flouting public smoking rules, as per a bill drafted by the health ministry.

Nidhi Sharma reports. ▶▶ 3



HEALTH MIN MOVES A DRAFT AMENDMENT BILL

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Nidhi.Sharma@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The government moves to increase the smoking age from 18 to 21 years, ban sale of loose cigarettes, do away with designated smoking rooms at airports and restaurants, and increase penalties for flouting public smoking rules to curb smoking in the country.

The health ministry has drafted the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) (Amendment) Bill 2020 after a three year-long meticulous exercise.

One of the major amendments is to Section 6 to increase the legal smoking age from 18 to 21 years.

"No person shall sell, offer for sale, or permit sale of cigarettes or any other tobacco product to or by any person who is under 21 years of age," reads the draft amendment released on the ministry's website to elicit views and comments of the public.

The 2003 Act had specified this age as 18 years.

The government has also sought to ban sale of loose cigarettes.

"Since cigarettes are sold loose, they become economically more accessible to people, especially the students," a senior health ministry official told ET. "At the same time they miss the messaging and warning on packs."

A proviso has been inserted in

Section 7 which says, "Provided that trade and commerce in cigarette or any other tobacco product shall be in sealed, intact and original packing."

Another step being proposed is doing away with smoking rooms at airports, restaurants and hotels. Section 4 of the 2003 Act bans smoking in public, but provides for a smoking area "in a hotel having 30 rooms or a restaurant having seating capacity of 30 persons or more and in the airports".

In the draft bill this proviso has been deleted, effecting a complete ban on public smoking in India.

Fine for smoking in public is also proposed to be increased from Rs 200 to Rs 2,000. Penalty for selling tobacco products to persons under the legal smoking age is also being increased from two years

imprisonment and Rs1,000 to seven years' imprisonment and up to Rs1 lakh fine.

The government has also proposed stricter punishment and imposition of penalties for manufacturing or importing illicit cigarettes or tobacco products. The health ministry had proposed a number of amendments to the 2003 legislation and put the draft in the public domain in 2015. However, it was withdrawn in 2017 to have a relook at the draft provisions and come up with a better version. The ministry re-initiated the process of amending the legislation and formed a sub-group.

The final draft seeks public suggestions till January 31.

Smoking areas in public places like airport lounges, hotels and restaurants to go and fine for smoking in public increased to ₹2,000