

## India to find 'pragmatic solutions' on tobacco rules for streaming firms

By Aditya Kalra | September 20, 2023



A child wearing a skull mask attends an anti-tobacco awareness rally during the World No Tobacco Day in Kolkata, India, May 31, 2019. REUTERS/Rupak De Chowdhuri/File Photo [Acquire Licensing Rights](#)

### Summary Companies

- Global streaming platforms worried about India tobacco rules
- India health ministry says will find pragmatic solution
- India wants audio-visual tobacco warnings in streaming content
- Industry worried this would require editing of old content

**NEW DELHI, Sept 20 (Reuters)** - India's health ministry has agreed to find "pragmatic solutions" for stricter tobacco warnings on content appearing on likes of Netflix and Amazon Prime after the streaming industry raised objections, a government meeting record showed.

To curb tobacco use, India in May ordered streaming platforms to insert static health warnings during smoking scenes and at least 50 seconds of anti-tobacco disclaimers at the start and in the middle of each programme.

The move sparked concerns at Netflix (NFLX.O), Amazon (AMZN.O), Walt Disney (DIS.N) and billionaire Mukesh Ambani's JioCinema platform, with executives fearing

the rules will force editing of millions of hours of existing content, diminish customers' experience and impinge on creators' freedom of expression.

In a closed-door meeting on Aug. 28, streaming executives met officials of India's Health Ministry and Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry and sought relaxations of the rules, and more time to comply beyond a three-month deadline, minutes of the confidential meeting, reviewed by Reuters, showed.

They found support from secretary Apurva Chandra of the I&B ministry, which regulates streaming platforms, who "pointed out concerns regarding implementation in respect of existing library of content, foreign content, and inclusion of health spots in the middle of the content". He suggested platforms can consider an appropriate health warning to be displayed when users log in.

Following the discussions, India's Health Secretary Sudhansh Pant "noted the harmful effects of tobacco use and concerns represented by the stakeholders and said that pragmatic solutions for operationalization and compliance ... would be looked into in the larger interest of public health," the minutes added.

The discussions - being reported by Reuters for the first time - signal India could change the rules or relax them in some way. It is not clear if, and when, the health ministry will change the rules.

The Health and I&B ministries did not respond to Reuters queries. Netflix, Amazon and Ambani's Viacom18 did not respond, while Disney declined comment. The four were among many companies that attended the Aug. 28 meeting.

Health activists have welcomed the new rules, saying tobacco kills 1.3 million people each year in India and the growing popularity of streaming platforms means they must be treated at par with cinemas and TV, where all smoking and alcohol drinking scenes require health warnings.

In 2013, Woody Allen stopped his film, Blue Jasmine, from being screened in India after learning about mandatory anti-tobacco warnings would be inserted into its smoking scenes.

During the meeting, streaming firms supported the rules in spirit, but highlighted implementation challenges. They committed to "displaying a disclaimer at the beginning" of content and no promotion of tobacco products on their platforms, the minutes stated.

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**Source:** <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/india-find-pragmatic-solutions-tobacco-rules-streaming-firms-2023-09-20/>