

## **TOBACCO USE AND CESSATION: JAPAN**

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### **Overview**

Despite significant investments in preventive health measures, the Japanese government has not fully committed to tobacco cessation efforts.<sup>1</sup> Japan ratified the World Health Organization's Framework Convention of Tobacco Control Treaty in 2004, but undermined its intent by altering the treaty language and making significant portions conditional as opposed to mandatory.<sup>2, 3</sup> Ultimately, tobacco control may contradict national economic aims.<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese government has 50.01% ownership in Japan Tobacco, Inc., the third largest cigarette exporter in the world.<sup>3, 4</sup> This leads to a national conflict of interest in which the government treats smoking as a behavioral issue rather than a health concern.<sup>5</sup> National law dictates the "sound development of our nation's tobacco industry" is a national legislative policy goal for two reasons: 'to ensure stable fiscal revenues' and for the 'sound development of the national economy.'<sup>6</sup>

Currently, there are no national smoking bans and few regulations on the tobacco industry's advertising, promotion and sponsorship practices.<sup>2</sup>

Many Japanese smokers are uninformed about the dangers of using tobacco. Japan Tobacco denies that smoking causes lung cancer and discounts the risks of secondhand smoke.<sup>3</sup> With limited government-sponsored education, the Japanese population is distrustful of tobacco use health warnings. For example, best-selling books in Japan assert and consumers believe that "light" or "low tar" cigarettes are safer than regular cigarettes.<sup>3, 5</sup>

## **Prevalence of Tobacco Use**

The Japan Smoking Rate Survey in 2013 found that Japan's smoking prevalence is at 20.9%.<sup>7</sup> Japan's national smoking rate (24.9%) is above the average (23%) rate for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)\* member countries.<sup>8</sup> Japan's male smoking rates are fourth highest among OECD nations.<sup>8,9</sup> Japan is the world's fourth largest tobacco market by consumption.<sup>4</sup> Cigarettes are the most common form of tobacco use, although smokeless cigarettes are gaining popularity.<sup>4,10</sup>

There are gender differences in smoking habits in Japan. Approximately 32.2% (16.23 million people total) of men and 10.5% (5.72 million people total) of women currently smoke.<sup>7</sup> Although smoking rates of men have declined, or in some ages (20 to 50 year olds) remained constant, smoking rates for women are on the rise.<sup>1,7</sup>

Due to the differences in smoking prevalence, Japanese men experience more tobacco-related health problems than women. Smoking is linked to 15% of all male deaths in Japan, compared to only 4% for women.<sup>12</sup>

The prevalence of smoking among minors (younger than age 20) is rising:

- 13% of male and 4.3% of female high school seniors report smoking daily.
- 21.7% of male and 9.7% of female high school seniors report smoking within the last month.

This increase in tobacco use among minors is especially concerning because historically Japanese smokers didn't begin using tobacco until their 20s.<sup>3</sup> However, a survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology stated that only "9% of high school senior boys want to smoke in the future."<sup>13</sup>

The number of health care professionals who smoke is alarming. Almost one-quarter (24%) of Japanese medical personnel are current smokers, as compared to 4% in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The Tobacco Policy and Education Division of the Japanese Ministry of Health does not promote smoking cessation among adults.<sup>14</sup> Instead, they focus on preventing minors from smoking.<sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Health has not publicly stated that they want to reduce tobacco prevalence among Japanese adults.<sup>3</sup>

## **Cost of Tobacco Use**

In comparison to other developed nations, smoking is relatively inexpensive in Japan: the most common brand sold for U.S.\$3.31 per pack in 2009.<sup>2</sup> A 2010 tax increased the price of a cigarette pack by 40% (approximately U.S.\$1.30 per pack).<sup>15</sup> This was the single largest increase in tobacco taxes in Japanese history.<sup>15</sup>

\* The OECD is an international organization that helps governments tackle the economic, social and governance challenges of a globalized economy.

The financial impact of smoking in Japan is costly. Direct health care costs of smoking in Japan include:

- 5% of all health care expenditures in 2005 were for treatment of smoking-related diseases.<sup>16</sup>
- Current smokers spend 14% more on dental care than non-smokers.<sup>17</sup>
- Smokers with hypertension cause 15.6% of all medical expenses.<sup>18</sup>

Indirect costs associated with smoking in Japan include decreased worker productivity, increased absenteeism and accidental fire damage. Research has not yet been published to fully outline these costs.

### **Tobacco-Related Health Information**

Smoking kills 130,000 Japanese people every year; it accounts for 1 in 8 deaths.<sup>19, 20</sup> Smoking is a risk factor in 4 of the 5 leading causes of death in Japan.<sup>20</sup> Heavy smokers live an average of 7 fewer years than non-smokers.<sup>12</sup>

At least 6,800 of tobacco-related deaths are due to secondhand smoke.<sup>19</sup> More than half of these individuals were exposed to tobacco smoke in the workplace.<sup>19</sup>

Cancer and cardiovascular disease are the leading causes of death in Japan.<sup>21</sup> Lung cancer, tracheal cancer and bronchial cancer are the most common forms of cancer in Japan, resulting in:

- 23% of all male cancer deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- 13% of all female cancer deaths.<sup>1</sup>

Tobacco is also a contributing factor to cardiovascular disease, causing 27% of related male deaths and 5% of related female deaths.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the high prevalence of smoking, Japan has historically experienced relatively few smoking-related deaths as compared to other industrialized nations.<sup>3</sup> Dietary and smoking practices may explain this anomaly.<sup>3</sup> Japanese smokers not only began smoking later in life, they also consumed fewer cigarettes, thanks to cigarette shortages following World War II.<sup>3</sup> Green tea - a staple food item in Japan - has also been proven protective against lung and esophageal cancer.<sup>3</sup>

Although lower than in other industrialized nations, the prevalence of tobacco-related diseases in Japan is rising.<sup>3</sup> Diseases caused by tobacco use are expected to increase rapidly in coming decades.<sup>3</sup> If prevalence and consumption do not decline, lung cancer deaths will double in the next 30 years.<sup>3</sup>

### **Tobacco Use in the Workplace**

Smoking bans are rare in Japan; none exist at the national or regional level.<sup>2</sup> Smoking is common in all public spaces, including workplaces.<sup>22</sup> Some local authorities have enacted partial bans.<sup>22</sup> In 2010, the first local ban was passed in the Kanagawa prefecture of Tokyo, prohibiting smoking in government offices, schools and hospitals.<sup>22</sup>

Not all tobacco cessation news in Japan is sour. Some national efforts to reduce secondhand smoke are underway. In December 2010, a Japanese Ministry of Health committee submitted a proposal to ban workplace smoking.<sup>23</sup> This proposal would allow designated smoking rooms but outlines no penalties for violations.<sup>23, 24</sup> The committee intends to lobby the government to financially support employers

that want to transition their workplaces smoke-free.<sup>24</sup> The proposal faces strong opposition from many in the food service industry.<sup>23</sup>

On issues of tobacco control, the Japanese government has typically relied on Japan Tobacco to self-regulate.<sup>3</sup> The industry has gradually implemented restrictions (e.g., 2008 implementation of age-verification technology in cigarette vending machines to prevent minors from purchasing tobacco).<sup>3</sup> In 2006, Japan Tobacco endorsed outdoor non-smoking zones or 'good manners areas.' These areas are designated spaces that promote polite and safe smoking behaviors.<sup>3, 10</sup> As a result, smoking bans occur most frequently in outdoor rather than indoor areas and increasingly impact public spaces.<sup>3, 10</sup> Smokeless cigarettes are exempt from all outdoor bans.<sup>23</sup>

The Health Promotion Law of 2003 gave employers the authority to implement smoking bans within their facilities.<sup>3</sup> Although this resulted to some large employers (e.g., McDonalds, Narita International Airport, etc.) implementing smoking bans, tobacco control remains the least common health promotion initiative offered in the workplace.<sup>22, 25</sup>

A survey of Japanese government workers found that 60% believed workplace smoking bans with designated smoking rooms would be the best tobacco control policy.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, in workplaces with tobacco control policies already in place, total smoking bans were popular: 73.9% of employees approved of them.<sup>26</sup> Tobacco control policies become less popular the milder they become.<sup>26</sup> Smokers adhere most to total tobacco bans.<sup>26</sup>

### **Tobacco Cessation Treatment Options**

Smoking cessation assistance in Japan is available in many hospitals and clinics.<sup>2</sup> Japan's universal health insurance covers prescription medication to assist smokers to quit.<sup>27</sup>

- Verenicline is available with a prescription.<sup>27</sup>
- Bupropion is **not** approved for sale in Japan.<sup>27</sup>
- Nicotine replacement therapy is available at pharmacies.<sup>27</sup>

The government does not offer direct smoking cessation assistance to individuals or employers.<sup>2</sup> Research conducted in Japanese workplaces has shown the effectiveness of workplace tobacco cessation initiatives. Employers offering smoking cessation programs can significantly increase the number of employees who quit smoking.<sup>28</sup> Successful programs have included informational campaigns about the dangers of tobacco use, short-term counseling and medication for employees who desired it.<sup>28</sup>

### **Resources**

- [Allan Carr's Easy Way to Stop Smoking - Japanese page](#)
- [How to Quit Smoking Steps from Medline Plus, in English and Japanese](#)

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