

Progress in the Philippines: Graphic health warnings on electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products

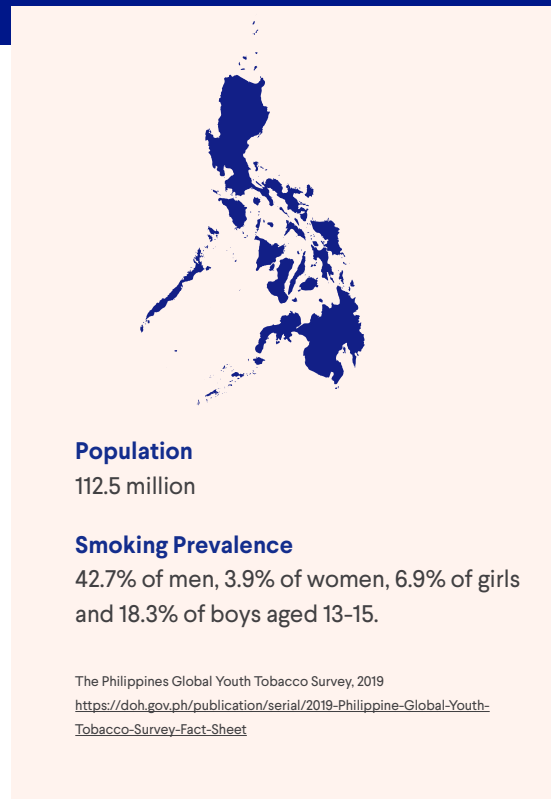
Recent data in the Philippines shows that the percentage of youth who say they have ever used electronic cigarettes [increased from 11.7% in 2015 to 24.6% in 2019](#). In response, in November 2021 the Philippine government became the second in the world to require graphic health warnings not just on traditional cigarettes, but also on electronic products, including e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products. The warnings were designed to vividly illustrate the health consequences of using electronic tobacco products and the dangers of secondhand exposure to their emissions.

The Philippines previously passed graphic health warnings into law for cigarettes in 2014.¹ As of 2021, more than 120 countries have mandated graphic health warnings on cigarette packs depicting the negative health impacts of use.² As electronic cigarettes have gained popularity in the past decade, governments worldwide have considered options to communicate the current evidence about their health risks to the public. Graphic health warning labels are a best-practice intervention for tobacco control, shown to be **more effective than text-only warnings**. Because of this, they are also the best option for warnings on packages of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products.

Available evidence shows that electronic products contain chemicals such as formaldehyde, propylene glycol, and other substances that can harm both the user and those who are exposed to secondhand emissions. The Philippine Department of Health issued the first set of graphic health warning templates on electronic products in 2021, as formally mandated by Republic Act No. 11346 and Republic Act No. 10643, known as the Graphic Health Warnings Law.

This law was a result of the sustained, collective effort of many civil society and grassroots advocates, as well as Philippine government officials' commitment to protecting the public's health. Vital Strategies' tobacco control team worked with the Department of Health to support the sourcing of images and responded to inquiries about what health impact claims were supported by current evidence.

Although this legislation is a landmark achievement, graphic health warnings are not the only regulations needed to address the issue of youth use of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products which is a particular concern in the Philippines because because of how sharply their use has increased in this group. The Philippine Pediatric Society has also reported that the top reasons youth give for using these products include



¹ <https://www.who.int/philippines/news/detail/22-06-2014-philippines-signs-into-law-graphic-health-warnings>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2782665>

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online accessibility, presence of varied flavors, and the misconception that e-cigarettes or heated tobacco products are safe. Stringent complementary measures were also set in place in 2020 including laws that mandate regulation by the Food and Drug Administration, restriction of sales to people under 21 years old, and prohibition of flavors other than plain tobacco or plain menthol.

These images comprise the first set of graphic health warnings on electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products in the Philippines as mandated by Republic Act No. 11346 and Republic Act No. 10643, also known as the Graphic Health Warnings Law.

1. This product might cause harm to lungs
2. Ingestion of this product's liquid could cause acute nicotine poisoning
3. This product might cause damage to people who are exposed to its vapor/smoke
4. This product contains poisonous chemicals
5. This product may cause harm to people exposed to its vapor/smoke
6. This product may cause explosion injury
7. This product could cause throat irritation
8. This product could cause lung injury
9. This product contains chemicals that may cause cancer



This case study is part of a series highlighting our work in the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use in priority countries.

About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. We work with governments and civil society in more than 73 countries to design and implement evidence-based strategies that tackle their most pressing public health problems. Our goal is to see governments adopt promising interventions at scale as rapidly as possible. To find out more, please visit www.vitalstrategies.org or Twitter @VitalStrat.