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Sunday, Aug 06, 2023
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A month on, banned gutkha pouches back in Vadodara

More than a month since gutkha sale was banned in the state, under-the-counter sale of the product has become common in the city, even as the officials of the health department of the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) go easy on raids to check the sale.



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For gutkha addicts, the product is now easily available with small vendors, despite the product having been banned since September 11, as per a notification issued by the state government.

At Tower Road in the city, just near a garba venue where a large banner of Manikchand Group, the maker of the RMD paan masala, greets visitors, a small paan masala vendor offers gutkha pouch at double the price, to the delight of the addicts who are not able to come to terms with the ban.

After the ban, it was not easy to find gutkha, but a week or two later, it is now possible to get the product anywhere in the city or outside. I buy my daily dose from my known vendor and I can get it from other vendors as well, said a person who was buying gutkha from a vendor in the city.

VMC officials said the product was being sold despite the ban but they were not able to nail down the vendors flouting the rule as they hide the product as soon as they get a whiff of the raid. This is perhaps what explains the fact that not a single vendor or supplier has been fined for selling or possessing gutkha.

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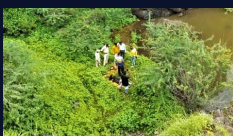
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VMC health officials conducted raids over 15 spots in a day since the ban came into effect and carried out the raids with same intensity for at least one week since September 11, though they could not find any vendors or stockists with gutkha.

We act on complaints and have carried out 15 to 17 raids in a day for at least a week since the ban came into effect, though we did not get anything to fine vendors or suppliers. The frequency of raids have decreased, mainly as we found most of the complaints to be hoax. Now, we insist that the person complaining about the raids remain present when we go for raids, VMCs additional health officer Mukesh Vaidya, said.

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Anti-tobacco activists said gutkha is being home-delivered like Indian Made Foreign Liquor in the city. The ban on gutkha has become a joke. People are now even getting home-delivery of the banned product, said Anant Christian, who runs NGO.

First published on: 23-10-2012 at 03:09 IST

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