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Gujarats Commissioner of Food Safety has issued a notification banning the manufacture, storage, distribution or sale of gutkha and pan masala known by any names containing tobacco or nicotine as an ingredient for one year starting September 11,2012.

Ahmedabad | September 2, 2012 06:18 IST





Gujarats Commissioner of Food Safety has issued a notification banning the manufacture, storage, distribution or sale of gutkha and pan masala known by any names containing tobacco or nicotine as an ingredient for one year starting September 11,2012.

However, the ban will not be applicable in respect of 100% export-oriented units, the notification says.

Significantly, the government has also banned any other products marketed separately to constitute as gutkha and pan masala as final product.

Some reports had indicated ingenious gutkha companies had begun selling ingredients separately to circumvent the ban.

Citing a research done at Tata Memorial Hospital, the notification says gutkha and pan masala cause carcinogenic and co-carcinogenic effects and their consumption leads to increased risks of oral cancer.

It also says that several NGOs had urged the the state government to put a complete ban on the sale of gutkha and pan masala in Gujarat.

While the notification does not specify the punishments for violating the ban, the Food Safety Act of 2006, under which the notification was passed, allows officials to impose a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh on offenders. Imprisonment up to six months can also be awarded to a second-time offender.

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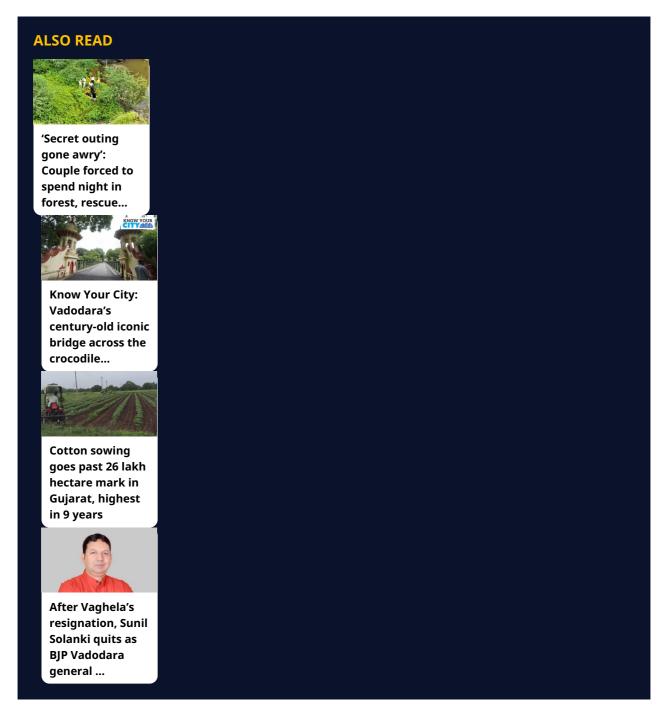
The legal counsel for the semi-government Public Health Foundation of India, which lobbied for the ban in Gujarat while partnering with the government for anti-tobacco curriculum in some state-run schools, however, said the exemption for exporting units appeared to be a move to pacify the tobacco industry. Gujarat produced 2,81,000 tonnes of tobacco crop in the 2010-11 financial year.

It is a matter of concern. If these units continue to operate in the state, gutkha and pan masala products may leak into the domestic market. Strict vigilance and implementation would be needed, said Amit Yadav, PHFIs legal counsel.

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Consumption of gutkha and pan masala is extremely prevalent in Gujarat, and oncologists say most of the cancer cases are cancers of the head and neck and can be traced to consumption of smokeless tobacco.

The state-run Gujarat Cancer Research Centre treated almost 2.5 lakh outdoor follow-up patients and more than 25,000 new patients in the 2010-2011.



Oncologists at large private hospitals such as Apollo say eight out of ten cancer patients treated at their facilities in the state consume tobacco.

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