

Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) Timor-Leste 2019



REGIONAL OFFICE FOR

**World Health
Organization**

South-East Asia

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Foreword by H.E. Minister of Health, Ministry of Health, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste



Adolescence (age 10 to 19 years) is a critical period during which the foundations for developing healthy, productive citizens and future leaders are built. It is also a phase of development where one is highly vulnerable to adopting unhealthy behaviours such as tobacco use, which has devastating health consequences at this stage as well as in adulthood.

With over 65% of the total population of Timor-Leste being under the age of 24 years, adolescents and young people are central to the country's health and socioeconomic development. Therefore, the Government of Timor-Leste continues to accord top priority to the healthy development of young people as is evident in the National Youth Policy (2016) that includes the promotion of healthy lifestyles among youths as one of its five focus areas.

Tobacco use in any form, smoked and smokeless, affects almost every organ of the human body. It is one of the most potent risk factors for noncommunicable diseases and a leading cause of death in the world. With nearly 70% of adult males smoking cigarettes and 27% of adult females using some form of smokeless tobacco, Timor-Leste is one of the countries with the highest tobacco use rates in the world. The prevalence of tobacco is also high among adolescents in the country.

The third Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) in Timor-Leste was conducted in 2019 among a nationally representative sample of students aged 13–15 years. While it is encouraging to note a drop in the overall prevalence of tobacco use in any form (smoked and smokeless) from 42% in 2013 to 30.9% in 2019, the figures are still very high. The overall smoking prevalence of 22.5% estimated by the 2019 GYTS ranks Timor-Leste as the country with the highest smoking prevalence among youths in the South-East Asia Region. The 2019 GYTS also found, among others, that about 63% of current smokers were able to buy cigarettes from a local shop/store. These findings clearly highlight the need for our continued prioritization and intensification of collective national efforts informed by local scientific evidence to protect our young people and future leaders from the menace of tobacco use.

I am, therefore, very pleased to present this survey report. I am hopeful that the report will enable the Ministry of Health and our valued national and international partners involved with different aspects of tobacco prevention and control to guide the development and implementation of cohesive and effective tobacco control interventions for our youth.

I take this opportunity, on behalf of the Ministry of Health, to extend our sincere gratitude to the World Health Organization, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, United States of America, for their unwavering support for this survey, including the production of this report. I also express my sincere gratitude for the extraordinary support and cooperation extended by the Ministry of Education, students, teachers and everyone involved with the preparation and administration of the survey.

dr. Odete Maria Freitas Belo, MPH
H.E. Minister of Health
Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Message from the Regional Director



The results of the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) Timor-Leste 2019 show that more than four of every 10 students aged 13–15 years consume tobacco products. The tobacco smoking prevalence among youth in the country stands at around 37% – the highest among all countries in the WHO South-East Asia Region. Immediate and focused action is needed to protect Timorese youth from the menace of tobacco consumption.

Early- through middle-adolescence is the developmental stage in which tobacco consumption usually commences. Young adolescents cannot fully comprehend the consequences of using tobacco products. Adolescence is probably the only developmental stage during which tobacco use could be viewed as “functional”. Tobacco smoking can be seen by adolescents as serving key developmental tasks, such as establishing independence, identity, autonomy and intimacy. Adolescents can become addicted to tobacco products and find it difficult to quit. Attracting young people to use a particular brand of tobacco products is critical to the future of the tobacco industry. Young people tend to use the same brand as they grow older.

According to the GYTS 2019, in Timor-Leste, around 66% of students noticed tobacco advertisements or promotions at points of sale. About 70% of students saw tobacco use on television, videos or movies. More than 25% of students have been offered a free tobacco product from a tobacco company representative. More than 20% of students had something with a tobacco brand logo on it.

I note with appreciation that the Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste has consistently monitored the prevalence of tobacco use among youth. Timor-Leste has conducted GYTSs in the years 2006, 2009 and 2013, and now in 2019. Timor-Leste’s ongoing commitment to implement effective tobacco control measures is commendable, particularly with regard to graphic health warnings on tobacco packaging.

There is significantly more to do. Priority “best buys” include raising tax on tobacco, applying a comprehensive ban on TAPS (tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship), and strengthening country capacity for tobacco cessation. I am certain

that the trends and results highlighted in this survey will help Timor-Leste plan for success. By integrating the recommendations of this report into national tobacco control plans, Timor-Leste will continue to implement an evidence-informed approach to achieving a tobacco-free society. WHO will continue to provide its full support to that endeavour, for a healthier and more sustainable future for all.



Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh
Regional Director
WHO South-East Asia

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