



A GLOBAL
TOBACCO
INDUSTRY
WATCHDOG

COVID-19
Monitoring
Brief



Global



STOP COVID-19 Monitoring Brief: The tobacco industry, its interests and allies

Edition 13: January-March

March 25, 2021

This brief covers the previous 8 weeks' developments.

Previous editions of the STOP COVID-19 Monitoring Brief are now available on the [COVID-19 Tobacco Tactics resource page](#) and via the [STOP COVID-19 Action Center](#)

Louis Laurence and Amelia Crowther
Researchers at [TobaccoTactics.com](#)
Tobacco Control Research Group
University of Bath
Part of the STOP Partnership

Developments in the January-March monitoring period

Tobacco Regulation

• South African Tobacco Ban:

— A National Income Dynamics Study in South Africa has shown that the government lost R5.8bn in tobacco excise taxes during the 20-week ban period.¹

— British American Tobacco South Africa (BATSA) has warned the government that the 8% double inflation increase in tobacco excise tax is a “dangerous mistake” given the growing illicit tobacco trade.² The South African Tobacco Transformation Alliance (SATTA) also argued that illegal tobacco traders will profit from this increase in excise tax.^{3,4,5}

— The South African High Court has granted Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs government minister, leave to appeal the adverse ruling on the tobacco ban which found it unconstitutional and invalid.⁶

— BATSA stated it was “disappointed, but not surprised” the government was granted leave to appeal the court ruling that the tobacco ban was unconstitutional.⁷ BATSA said the government should use the money it will spend on the appeal on fighting the COVID pandemic and illicit tobacco trade instead.⁸

• Chhattisgarh state in India has made a legal amendment to the 2004 Kopta Act and banned tobacco consumption for youth under 21 years old.⁹

Reports and Research on Tobacco and COVID

- A study published in the JAMA Internal Medicine journal suggests that increased cumulative smoking exposure was associated with a higher risk of hospitalization and mortality from COVID-19.¹⁰
- Japan Tobacco International (JTI) published a report on how illegal tobacco trade is operating during COVID and sets out JTI's plan to tackle "The Gathering Storm" of illicit trade.^{11,12}
- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), under the Indian Ministry of Science and Technology, recently conducted a 'Sero Survey' across India. The research was conducted by 40 of their organisations and found that smokers have a lower risk of contracting the coronavirus.¹³
- A study by the African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine showed that emergency attendance for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease at the George Regional Hospital in the Western Cape fell by over 69% between January and August 2020, compared to the same time period in 2019. This has been attributed as a benefit of the tobacco sales ban in South Africa.^{14,15}

Corporate Social Responsibility

- Imperial Tobacco Canada, a wholly-owned subsidiary of BAT, in response to the ongoing province-wide shut down in Québec sent out "wellness boxes" to employees and has organised "Meal Prep Mondays" and "Wellness Wednesdays" to provide support for employees working from home. Imperial Tobacco Canada has been recognised as one of Montreal's Top Employers in 2021.^{16,17}
- Vietnam Tobacco Corporation released PR campaign promoting the work they have done throughout 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID and ensure production and stability of jobs for their employees.¹⁸
- The state-owned tobacco enterprise Libanaise Des Tabacs Et Tombacs (Regie) provided respiratory assist devices to its employees, and their dependents, infected with COVID.¹⁹

- BAT gave a presentation on its preliminary results for 2020 stating it was "supporting communities with testing equipment, 3D printers, & medical & hygiene equipment" and "partnering with leaf growing communities to support water supply and sanitation" through the pandemic. The presentation also stated BAT had ensured "COVID-secure workplace measures in all markets" and that "no employees [were] made redundant or furloughed due to COVID crisis".²⁰

Vaccine Development

- French pro-tobacco website lemondedutabac.com published an article stating the Spanish Ministry of Health has concluded an agreement with Logista for the distribution of the COVID vaccine to Spain's autonomous communities. Logista is a "fully consolidated subsidiary" of Imperial Brands, according to the group's most recent annual report, that delivers tobacco and non-tobacco products.²¹
- The chairman of the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) in Sri Lanka has said giving a COVID vaccine to individuals who are addicted to tobacco is "not effective" as smoking impairs their immunity.²²

Tobacco Business

- The COVID pandemic has been blamed for a 25% drop in cigarette sales in Mexico by BAT executive. The article does not quote official public health sources and promotes IQOS products.²³
- Data released by the Ministry of Finance shows tobacco sales fell by a third in the Spanish Balearic Islands due to the State of Emergency and drop in tourists.²⁴
- BATSA has stated its sales have rebounded following the lifting of restrictions in August from the South African five-month tobacco ban.²⁵
- In the UK, cigarette sales increased by 7% to £12.4bn during lockdown, despite an estimated 1m people quitting smoking.^{26,27}
- BAT Malaysia's managing director Johnathon Reed has said the company's performance continues to be undermined by high illicit cigarette volumes and a growth of the illicit vaping market.²⁸

Additional Resources

- **CDC advice** on [smoking and COVID-19](#)
- **Tobacco Tactics: Illicit Tobacco Trade**
- **Tobacco Tactics: Corporate Social Responsibility**
- **The Union: COVID-19** - Bi-weekly brief on the science of smoking and COVID-19
- **WHO: COVID-19 vaccine**

Get in touch

We welcome any contributions on issues mentioned in this update or anything related to COVID-19 and the Tobacco Industry. Contact us at bath@exposetobacco.org.

STOP's Rapid Engaged Action Team (REACT) supports governments and advocates facing challenges from the tobacco industry on crucial policy debates. [Request help](#)

Visit the [Tobacco Tactics COVID-19](#) page for further information.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2021-02-18-cigarette-lockdown-ban-big-brands-still-suffering-as-smokers-choose-cheap/>
2. <https://www.scribd.com/document/495873943/Budget-sees-tobacco-industry-s-hopes-of-recovery-go-up-in-smoke-Fita-Batsa>
3. <https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/307/213422.html>
4. <https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/alcohol-tobacco-industries-bemoan-excise-tax-increase-2021-02-25>
5. <https://letabaherald.co.za/96285/alcohol-tobacco-industries-slam-new-punishing-taxes/>
6. <https://mg.co.za/news/2021-03-01-high-court-grants-dlamini-zuma-leave-to-appeal-adverse-ruling-on-tobacco-ban/>
7. <https://www.news24.com/fin24/companies/health/use-money-for-ndzs-tobacco-ban-appeal-to-tackle-illegal-cigarette-boom-batsa-20210302>
8. <https://mg.co.za/news/2021-03-03-tobacco-industry-calls-dlamini-zumas-bid-to-appeal-ban-a-costly-fooly/>
9. <https://www.patrika.com/raipur-news/now-tobacco-consumption-will-be-banned-for-youth-under-21-6657513/>
10. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2775677>
11. <https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/jti-report-warns-of-a-gathering-storm-in-the-black-market-859729162.html>
12. <https://www.jti.com/sites/default/files/global-files/documents/download-pdf/the-gathering-storm.pdf>
13. <https://nongnghiep.vn/nguoi-hut-thuoc-la-an-chay-kho-mac-coronavirus-hon-d282031.html>
14. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-03-08-cigarette-ban-was-successful-drop-in-lung-disease-visits-at-wc-hospital/>
15. <https://www.goexpress.co.za/2021/03/14/hard-lockdowns-tobacco-ban-saw-drop-in-smoking-related-health-conditions/>
16. <https://montrealgazette.com/sponsored/top-employers/flexibility-is-the-new-normal-at-imperial-tobacco-canada>
17. <https://reviews.canadastop100.com/top-employer-imperial-tobacco?lang=en>
18. Tổng Công ty Thuốc lá Việt Nam: Làm tốt công tác phòng chống dịch Covid-19 (doanhnghieptiepthi.vn)
19. <https://www.rltt.com.lb/Article/564/regie-provides-respiratory-assist-devices-for-its/en>
20. [https://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK_9D9KCY.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DOBYAP42/\\$file/FY_2020_Presentation_Slides.pdf](https://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK_9D9KCY.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DOBYAP42/$file/FY_2020_Presentation_Slides.pdf)
21. <http://www.lemondedutabac.com/?s=Logista>
22. <http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/02/05/local/240816/vaccinating-smokers-drug-addicts-less-effective-%E2%80%93-nata>
23. <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/empresas/covid-esfuma-una-cuarta-parte-de-las-ventas-de-cigarros-en-2020>
24. <https://www.majorcadailybulletin.com/news/international/2021/01/29/78273/mallorca-coronavirus-tobacco-sales.html>
25. <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/retail-and-consumer/2021-02-17-bat-says-sa-sales-have-rebounded-strongly-from-tobacco-ban/>
26. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9287705/Sales-cigarettes-rose-7-12-4billion-coronavirus-lockdown-figures-reveal.html>
27. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/category-reports/tobacco-category-report-2021-why-are-tobacco-sales-up-in-the-middle-of-a-global-health-pandemic/653387.article>
28. <https://www.nst.com.my/business/2021/02/664796/illicit-market-continues-undermine-bats-performance>