

Press Release from Health and Family Welfare Department

Third State Level Coordination Committee Meeting on National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) Held in Gangtok

Gangtok, October 29, 2025: The third State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) Meeting under the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) was held on October 28 at the Teesta Lounge, Tashiling Secretariat, Gangtok, under the chairmanship of Shri Ravindra Telang, IAS, Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, to review and update the progress of NTCP implementation in the State. The meeting was attended by all line department members of the State Level Coordination Committee.

The meeting began with a welcome address by Shri Tshewang Gyachho, IAS, Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, who presented an overview of the agenda and spoke on the COTPA, ToFEI, and PECA Acts.

This was followed by a presentation by Dr. Tempo Gyaltzen Bhutia, Director, NTCP, who highlighted that tobacco use remains the single largest cause of preventable deaths and illnesses, claiming the lives of half of its users through premature deaths. He stressed that tobacco often serves as a gateway to other forms of substance abuse, emphasizing that controlling tobacco can significantly help in curbing other addictions.

Discussing the key provisions of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, He outlined the following:

Section 4: Ban on smoking in public places

Section 5: Ban on tobacco advertisements

Section 6(a): Prohibition of sale of tobacco products to and by minors

Section 6(b): Ban on sale of tobacco products within 100 yards of educational institutions

Section 7: Mandatory health warnings on tobacco product packaging, to be updated annually

He also clarified common misconceptions regarding smoking zones, noting that such zones are permitted only in:

Hotels with 30 or more rooms,

Restaurants with seating capacity of 30 or more, and

Airports.

He emphasized that no other premises are permitted to have smoking areas.

An open house discussion followed, during which members of the committee put forth several suggestions, including:

Increasing awareness among new and potential users, and promoting tobacco use as a social taboo.

Introducing school-based activities to educate students about the dangers and health hazards of tobacco use.

Conducting a survey among users to understand the reasons and circumstances leading to tobacco initiation, so that preventive strategies can be designed accordingly.

Enhanced monitoring of tobacco sales, particularly within restricted yellow-line areas near educational institutions.

Conducting sensitization programs for enforcement squads to strengthen implementation.

Designing counter-advertising campaigns that challenge the false perception of tobacco use as a symbol of freedom or modernity, especially among youth.

In his concluding remarks, Chief Secretary Shri Ravindra Telang stressed that greater emphasis must be placed on awareness and prevention from an early age, as habits formed in youth are harder to overcome later. He urged the Education Department, Health Department, and enforcement agencies to treat tobacco control as a serious public health and social concern, noting that addiction often begins with tobacco and escalates to alcohol and other substances if left unchecked.

The meeting concluded with a collective commitment to strengthen awareness, enforcement, and community participation towards a tobacco-free Sikkim.