



STOPPING TOBACCO  
ORGANIZATIONS & PRODUCTS

COVID-19  
Monitoring  
Brief



Global



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

**Edition 7:** Covering the period  
June 28 - July 10, 2020

July 15, 2020

**We will be reviewing the format of future briefings in light of the changing situation around COVID-19; for example, moving to monthly briefings focusing on a specific issue each month. We have put together a survey to gather your valued feedback on the format and frequency of these briefings. This will take just 5 minutes to fill out and we really appreciate your input. We will be closing the survey on July 27.**

[SURVEY HERE](#)

Previous editions of the STOP COVID-19 Monitoring Brief will be hosted on the [COVID-19 Tobacco Tactics resource page](#) from next week. They will be a publicly available resource to track industry tactics during the pandemic.

## Headlines in the Seventh Monitoring Period

- [WHO has launched a programme](#) to help 1.3 billion people quit during COVID-19. The programme began in Jordan with donations of 37,800 nicotine patches from Johnson and Johnson.<sup>1</sup>
- PMI receives U.S. government bonds despite large profits and public health costs. Governments also supporting tobacco workers neglected by industry.
- South Africa tobacco ban decision goes to appeal.
- WHO issues latest review of evidence around smoking and COVID-19.
- STOP is regularly updating the [COVID-19 Action Center with articles that chart how the tobacco industry is taking advantage of the global pandemic](#).

## Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

PMI, along with 10 other partners including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, have launched a campaign to raise awareness of the trade in fraudulent personal protective equipment for COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> They cite their [experience in combatting the illicit tobacco trade](#) as reason for involvement. The industry, including PMI, has a history of profiting from tobacco smuggling<sup>3</sup> and attempting to control tobacco track and trace programmes.<sup>4</sup>

## Vaccine development

Pharmaceutical company GSK has partnered with 40% PMI owned Medicigo to assist in producing Medicigo's plant synthesised COVID-19 vaccine. GSK is aiming to make the vaccine available in the first half of 2021.<sup>5</sup> PMI is now "evaluat[ing] offers for its shareholding from parties that may be better suited to help Medicigo on the next phase of its journey" according to a statement on the Medicigo website.<sup>6</sup>

## Additional Resources

GGTC's [list](#) of country specific tobacco industry donations during COVID-19 between March and June 2020.

[Tobacco Tactics: Tobacco Smuggling](#)

## Tobacco industry Government Relief

- In the USA, the Federal Reserve bought \$428 million in corporate bonds from companies including PMI as part of its COVID-19 recovery plan.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, STOP is asking that the industry be held financially accountable for smoking-related health harms<sup>8</sup> and evidence suggests that smoking increases the severity and mortality of those with COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>
- In Andhra Pradesh, India, the State government is buying tobacco straight from farmers to support them as they suffer delays in auctions and reduced prices during COVID-19.<sup>10</sup>

## Tobacco Regulation

### [South Africa](#) tobacco ban

- Following the Pretoria High Court's decision to uphold the South African government's tobacco ban, the Fair Trade Tobacco Association (FITA) is seeking to appeal the judgement at the Supreme Court of Appeal.<sup>11</sup> The Pretoria High Court will hear the appeal on July 15.<sup>12</sup>
- Members of the STOP team have published an article [detailing the tobacco industry's hypocrisy on illicit trade in South Africa](#). Concerns over illicit trade has been a cornerstone of the industry's legal arguments against the tobacco ban in South Africa.<sup>13</sup>

## Additional Resources

GGTC's list of COVID-19 related bans and contemplated bans per country: [Bans/ Contemplated Bans on Tobacco/ Vaping Products](#)

[GGTC's list of Pushback and Statements vs smoking/vaping/ TII during COVID-19](#)

STOP - [The Tobacco Industry's Subversive Lobbying During COVID-19](#)

## Academic Research of Industry Relevance

An article in Tobacco Reporter examines the [nicotine hypothesis](#), saying that "policy makers should presume there is a protective effect [of nicotine against COVID-19] until proven otherwise".<sup>14</sup>

The WHO has updated its [scientific brief on smoking and COVID-19](#), having analysed the latest peer reviewed research. The report concludes that **the evidence suggests smoking increases severity of disease and death in hospitalized patients with COVID-19, but that there is no evidence to address how likely smokers are to catch COVID-19. Population-based studies are needed to address this question.**

## Additional Resources

[The Union: COVID-19](#) – Bi-weekly brief on the science of smoking and COVID-19 under FAQ's section

## Future briefings

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](mailto: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](#)

[Please complete our 5 min survey](#) so that we can make the best use of our tobacco industry COVID-19 monitoring.

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

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/09-07-2020-who-and-partners-to-help-more-than-1-billion-people-quit-tobacco-to-reduce-risk-of-covid-19>
- 2 <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20200713005505/en/Philip-Morris-International-Launches-COVID-19-Anti-Fraudulent-Goods>
- 3 <https://tobaccoatlas.org/2020/06/09/philip-morris-makes-profit-on-cigarettes-smuggled-to-ecuador-and-now-seeks-government-compensation-for-these-same-cigarettes/>
- 4 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29899082/>
- 5 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-gsk-medicago/gsk-to-develop-plant-based-covid-19-vaccine-with-canadas-medicago-idUKKBN2481PS>
- 6 <https://www.medicago.com/en/newsroom/gsk-and-medicago-announce-collaboration-to-develop-a-novel-adjuvanted-covid-19-candidate-vaccine/>
- 7 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-fed-bonds/big-tobacco-big-oil-and-buffett-join-feds-portfolio-idUSKBN23Z0M8>
- 8 <https://exposetobacco.org/news/stop-statement-covid-accountability/>
- 9 [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-Smoking-2020.2](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Smoking-2020.2)
- 10 <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/vijayawada/2020/jul/01/in-a-first-government-to-procure-tobacco-from-farmers-2163703.html>
- 11 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/fita-has-filed-appeal-over-cigarette-sales-ban-ruling-50356392>
- 12 [https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/pretoria-high-court-to-hear-fitas-application-for-appeal-next-week-50694964?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/pretoria-high-court-to-hear-fitas-application-for-appeal-next-week-50694964?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social)
- 13 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-09-the-tobacco-industrys-hypocrisy-on-illicit-trade/>
- 14 <https://www.tobaccoreporter.com/digital/june20/>