

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

**Edition 11:** October / November

November 24, 2020

**This brief is issued once a month covering the previous 4 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  
Researcher at TobaccoTactics.com  
Tobacco Control Research Group  
University of Bath  
Part of the STOP Partnership

## Developments in the October/November monitoring period

### Reports on Tobacco and COVID-19

- A report on US smoking habits from independent news site, Vox, showed that some people turned to cigarettes during the pandemic to deal with boredom and anxiety despite being aware of the health risks.<sup>1</sup>
- The Global Health Advocacy Incubator (supported by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids) released a report titled "How Big Food Undermined Public Health in the Era of COVID-19". It draws comparison with tactics used by the tobacco industry during the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

### Corporate Social Responsibility

- **Vaccine Development** – The Canadian government announced a CAD\$173 million investment to secure 76 million doses of Medicago's COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>3</sup> The vaccine has been shown to induce an immune response in early human trials.<sup>4</sup>

PMI (one third owner of Medicago) used the announcement for promotional purposes via their website, where PMI CEO André Calantzopoulos said: "We welcome the collaboration announced between two departments of the Canadian government and Medicago to accelerate its efforts against COVID-19."<sup>5</sup>

— PMI's involvement in the vaccine was reported widely, including in Romania<sup>6</sup>, Nigeria<sup>7</sup>, Malaysia<sup>8</sup>, Switzerland<sup>9</sup> and Indonesia.<sup>10</sup>

- PMI Vietnam have said they champion female leadership in the company during COVID-19.<sup>11</sup>
- Shehzad Munim, Managing Director of BAT Bangladesh, has promoted the company in a local newspaper interview, saying they protected workers jobs and maintained cigarette supply to customers.<sup>12</sup> BAT Bangladesh has been lobbying government agencies to prevent pandemic related regulation during COVID-19.<sup>13</sup>

## Tobacco Regulation

- Turkey has introduced a ban on smoking in many outdoor public spaces in response to the pandemic. They cite damage to health and crowding together of smokers with no masks as reasons for the ban.<sup>14</sup>
- North Korea has announced a similar ban on smoking in public “keeping in mind the hygiene of people amid the COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>15</sup> The country has not officially reported any COVID-19 deaths.
- JTI Malaysia has said tax increases on tobacco products should not happen for at least 2 years, arguing that higher tax will increase the illicit trade in cigarettes.<sup>16</sup> JTI used a similar argument in the Philippines, saying that smuggling has increased during COVID-19. JTI representatives were present at the destruction of smuggled cigarettes at a Filipino port alongside local officials.<sup>17</sup> Historically, JTI themselves have been involved in [tobacco smuggling operations](#).

## Tobacco Business

- BAT has reported reduced profits due to COVID-19. In Malaysia profits dropped by 23% in the third quarter of 2020, compared to last year. BAT blamed COVID-19 and illicit tobacco trade.<sup>18</sup> In Zimbabwe, BAT reported an 8% decline in sales compared to September 2019.<sup>19</sup>

## Additional Resources

- CDC advice on [smoking and COVID-19](#)
- Tobacco Tactics: [Tobacco Smuggling](#)
- Tobacco Tactics: [JTI Involvement in Smuggling](#)
- Tobacco Tactics: [Corporate Social Responsibility](#)
- GGTC’s list of COVID-19 related bans and contemplated bans per country: [Bans/ Contemplated Bans on Tobacco/ Vaping Products](#)
- 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](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](#)

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

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/21561419/smoking-cigarettes-covid-19-pandemic-juul-health-boredom>
- 2 <https://advocacyincubator.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GHAI-Facing-Two-Pandemics-Report-November-2020.pdf>
- 3 <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/10/23/prime-minister-announces-funding-advance-development-canadian-covid>
- 4 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKKBN27Q1FG>
- 5 <https://www.pmi.com/media-center/news/pmi-announces-medicago-to-supply-up-to-76-million-doses-of-its-plant-derived-covid-19-vaccine-candidate>
- 6 <https://www.bursa.ro/philip-morris-international-medicago-va-furniza-pana-la-76-de-milioane-de-doze-din-vaccinul-candidat-derivat-din-plante-impotriva-covid-19-45750142>
- 7 <https://leadership.ng/pharmaceutical-coy-supplies-76m-covid-19-vaccines-to-govt/>
- 8 <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2020/10/30/medicago-to-supply-covid-19-vaccine-candidate>
- 9 <https://www.ippmedia.com/en/features/pmi-announces-medicago-supply-76-million-doses-its-plant>
- 10 <https://internasional.kontan.co.id/news/medicago-akan-suplai-76-juta-dosis-vaksin-covid-19-untuk-kanada>
- 11 [https://tuoitre.vn/hau-covid-19-mo-ra-nhieu-co-hoi-nghe-nghiep-cho-phu-nu-20201020092451325.htm?fbclid=IwAR0EBB9w277IfRE4vo\\_3P8Ah70hKQv8B6POZvqRXo1IkD2iZTA0Zan6dwCg](https://tuoitre.vn/hau-covid-19-mo-ra-nhieu-co-hoi-nghe-nghiep-cho-phu-nu-20201020092451325.htm?fbclid=IwAR0EBB9w277IfRE4vo_3P8Ah70hKQv8B6POZvqRXo1IkD2iZTA0Zan6dwCg)
- 12 <https://ibtbd.net/shehzad-munim-managing-director-british-american-tobacco-bat/>
- 13 <https://blogs.bmj.com/tc/2020/07/03/tobacco-industry-lobbies-bangladesh-government-agency-to-champion-its-business-during-covid-19-pandemic/>
- 14 <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/turkey-implements-nationwide-ban-on-smoking-amid-warning-over-its-impact-on-pandemic/news>
- 15 <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/north-korea-regime-bans-smoking-in-certain-public-places-report.html>
- 16 <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2020/11/02/jti-malaysia-calls-for-concrete-action-against-illicit-cigarettes/>
- 17 <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2020/11/02/jti-malaysia-calls-for-concrete-action-against-illicit-cigarettes/>
- 18 <https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2020/10/29/bats-wings-clipped-by-covid-19-black-market>
- 19 <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/covid-19-takes-toll-on-tobacco-company/>