

Only 60% of smokers aware they are addicts: Pfizer poll

Kyodo News

Seventy-one percent of smokers are nicotine addicts requiring medical treatment, but only 60 percent of them are aware of their addiction, according to a recent survey by Pfizer Japan Inc., a major drug manufacturer based in Tokyo.

The survey found that by prefecture, the percentage of smokers aware of their nicotine addiction was highest in Osaka at 79 percent, while it was lowest in Tokushima at 49 percent.

The online survey of 9,400 smokers — 100 men and 100 women in each of the 47 prefectures — was conducted prior to World No Tobacco Day on May 31.

Nicotine addicts cannot kick the habit and become uncomfortable and frustrated when the level of nicotine in their blood diminishes. Nicotine addiction is classified as a psychological dependency. It is believed to recur easily and requires repeated treatment.

A screening test for nicotine addicts developed for Japanese, based on diagnostic criteria employed by the World Health Organization, was used in the survey.

People were asked 10 questions, including "Have you ever smoked much more than you intended to smoke?" Those who replied yes to more than five of the questions were classified as nicotine addicts.

The figure for nicotine addiction of 71 percent is almost the same as in a survey carried out in 2005, which covered about 1,700 smokers. That survey found no difference between men and women. The overall figure was highest in Tottori Prefecture at 80

percent and lowest in Kyoto Prefecture at 64 percent.

In the latest survey, 62 percent of the pollees said they were aware of nicotine addiction, 34 percent said they had heard of it, 68 percent said they had tried to quit smoking at least once and 43 percent said they would like to try immediately. But only 7 percent said they had consulted medical experts about quitting.

Manabu Sakuta, head of the Japan Society for Tobacco Control and a visiting professor at the Medical Faculty of Kyorin University, said, "I don't clearly know the reason for the regional differences, but it is possible that they reflect the number of medical experts enthusiastic about providing advice on quitting smoking and local government efforts.

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