

## Government programs in countries with high Betel quid/*Areca* use

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/>

Betel nut classes target curbing habit, preventing cancer

The Taipei City Government has begun holding betel nut withdrawal classes to help people who regularly chew the product to combat their addiction as the number of new cases of oral cancer continues to climb.

The classes are to become mandatory for people who are caught spitting betel nut juice or throwing betel nut residue on public ground, but they are also open for people who are looking advice on how to stop chewing.

People who spit betel nut juice are subject to a fine ranging from NT\$1,200 to NT\$6,000, according to the Waste Disposal Act (廢棄物清理法).

Starting yesterday, they are required to also attend the classes, and no-shows will be punished by a fine ranging from NT\$5,000 to NT\$300,000.

According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 2012, more than 5,700 Taiwanese people are diagnosed with oral cancer each year, 2,300 of whom are killed by the disease.

Oral cancer is particularly prevalent among men, mainly because the majority of the nation's betel nut eaters are male.

People who regularly chew betel nut are 28 times more likely to come down with the disease than people who do not, the statistics showed.

The statistics showed that of the nation's approximately 2 million betel nut chewers, 16.4 percent are aged from 40 to 49 and 15.3 percent are aged from 30 to 39, representing the two largest age brackets.

The habit is also correlated with education: Junior-high-school graduates account for the largest percentage of the country's betel nut chewing population (21.2 percent), trailed by senior-high-school graduates (15.3 percent) and diploma holders (3.4 percent).

"The courses will invite a number of specialists to teach people how to quit chewing betel nuts, such as National Taiwan University's Department of Dentistry professor Hahn Liang-jiunn (韓良俊), who is dubbed the 'father of betel nut prevention,' and Taipei City Xinyi District Health Center head nurse Lin Yueh-liang (林岳良)," the city government's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) said.

DEP Director Wu Sheng-chung (吳盛忠) said spitting betel nut juice and incorrectly disposing of residue damages the environment and poses a potential threat to public health.

"We hope that the classes help create a win-win situation for the city," Wu said.

>Ellen Gritz

On the topic of betel chewing increases in Myanmar, there was a brief and poorly thought out attempt by the new government who came into power in early 2016 to reduce betel chewing:

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20705-govt-takes-aim-at-betel-chewing.html>

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-government-issues-new-guidance-for-reducing-betel-nut-chewing-06142016140221.html>

Unfortunately, communication was poor, and in one area of Myanmar (Shadaw Township, Kayah State), the local official attempted to ban betel chewing altogether. Since then, the government has been silent on the matter. The only attempt I know of to improve the situation from a policy perspective is a small scale education & PR campaign through the People's Health Foundation (an NGO made up of retired former public health officials).

> Sam Glatman