

Smoke-Free Environments

SMOKE-FREE LAWS IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

Secondhand smoke is a primary source of air pollution in indoor public places, including workplaces, bars, restaurants and airports. Exposure to secondhand smoke causes lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, sudden infant death syndrome and other serious conditions.¹ Comprehensive smoke-free laws improve public health by reducing the public's exposure to secondhand smoke, helping smokers reduce their cigarette consumption or quit, preventing the youth from taking up smoking and making smoking less socially acceptable.

In 2004, Ireland became the first country to pass a comprehensive national smoke-free law. At least 60 countries and territories have passed comprehensive smoke-free legislation, including 39 low and middle income countries. Smoke-free legislation is credited with preventing 5.4 million premature deaths between 2007–2014.² However, low compliance to smoke-free laws remains a significant challenge.

SMOKE-FREE LAWS REDUCE EXPOSURE TO SECONDHAND SMOKE

Secondhand smoke contains a range of harmful chemicals, including carcinogens, toxic metals and poisonous gases. Comprehensive smoke-free laws reduce exposure to secondhand smoke by 80%–90% in bars and restaurants, and consequently reduce workers' risks of developing the various health harms caused by secondhand smoke.³

- In Montevideo, Uruguay, after a comprehensive national smoke-free law was implemented in 2006, the concentration of airborne nicotine particles (a marker for secondhand smoke) fell by 91% in public spaces.⁴

- A study examining the nicotine concentrations in bars and nightclubs in 24 cities in the Americas, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa from 2007–2009 found that the medium concentration of airborne nicotine in venues that permitted smoking was 17.5 times higher compared to smoke-free venues.⁵
- A 32-country study of public places from 2003–2007 found that the mean concentration of PM_{2.5} (an indicator of air pollution) was lowest in the countries with comprehensive national smoke-free laws: Uruguay, Ireland and New Zealand.⁶

SMOKE-FREE LAWS IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAVE LIVES

Comprehensive smoke-free laws reduce exposure to secondhand smoke thereby reducing the risk of developing heart disease. The evidence suggests that it may also reduce the risk of developing respiratory diseases and stroke.⁷

Cardiovascular Health

- It is estimated that smoke-free laws that include workplaces, restaurants and bars reduce the risk of heart attack by 85%.¹
- In São Paulo, Brazil, hospital admissions for heart attacks decreased by 5.4% within three months of implementation of a comprehensive smoke-free law in 2009, and the overall mortality rate decreased by 11.9% within seventeen months.⁸
- In Uruguay, hospital admissions for heart attacks

decreased by 22% two years after a comprehensive national smoke-free law was implemented in 2006.⁹

- A study of Ireland's 2004 comprehensive national smoke-free law found that implementation of the law was associated with a 12% reduction in hospital admissions for acute coronary syndromes (including heart attacks) within a year after the law was implemented.¹⁰

Respiratory Health

- According to a report of the U.S. Surgeon General, comprehensive smoke-free laws improve the respiratory health of bar and restaurant workers.¹
- Comprehensive smoke-free laws are associated with decreased hospital admissions for asthma and lung infections.¹¹

SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENTS: SMOKE-FREE LAWS IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

- A 2012 meta-analysis estimated that the risk of hospitalization for respiratory disease, particularly asthma and lung infections, was 24% lower after comprehensive smoke-free laws were implemented.¹¹
- A 2017 meta-analysis estimated that comprehensive smoke-free laws are associated with reducing hospital visits for asthma in children by 12.5%.¹²
- In Hong Kong, hospital admissions for lower respiratory tract infections (LRTI) in children decreased by 33.5% immediately after the

implementation of a comprehensive smoke-free law in 2007, and decreased a further 13.9% within the first year.¹³

- In Uruguay, non-hospital emergency visits for bronchospasms decreased by 15% after the implementation of a comprehensive national smoke-free law in 2006.¹⁴

Cerebrovascular Health

- The evidence suggests that comprehensive smoke-free laws reduce the risk of stroke by 81%.¹

SMOKE-FREE LAWS HELP REDUCE CIGARETTE CONSUMPTION AND YOUTH INITIATION

Smoke-free laws help reduce opportunities to smoke and make tobacco use less socially acceptable.

- Smoke-free laws reduce tobacco use in smokers by either helping smokers to smoke less or quit.¹ Smokers who work in smoke-free environments reduce their cigarette consumption by 2–4 cigarettes a day on average.³

- Laws that ban smoking in public places often have spillover effects and lead to less smoking or a no-smoke policy at home^{3,15}, one of the primary places of secondhand smoke exposure for children.

Key Messages

Article 8 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control obligates Parties to enact and implement strong smoke-free policies to reduce tobacco use and save lives. Comprehensive smoke-free laws:

- **Save lives and immediately improve public health;**
- **Reduce the public's exposure to secondhand smoke;**
- **Reduce cigarette consumption and help smokers quit;**
- **Make smoking less socially acceptable; and**
- **Prevent the youth from taking up smoking.**

References

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