

10 years of smokefree legislation: the facts

Why do we need smokefree legislation?

Decades of evidence has shown the link between exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS) and smoking related illness. SHS increases the risk of:

- heart disease
- breast cancer
- lung cancer
- stroke.¹

*The World Health Organization (WHO) have classified SHS as a known **class A human carcinogen**. It contains carcinogens such as arsenic, benzene, and asbestos.*

SHS can also reduce lung function; exacerbate respiratory problems; trigger asthma attacks; reduce coronary blood flow; irritate eyes; and cause headaches, coughs, sore throats, dizziness, and nausea.

In 2004, an estimated 1% of deaths worldwide were caused by SHS exposure. This amounted to 603,000 people.¹

In 2003, around 11,000 adults in the UK died due to SHS exposure in the home. In addition, an estimated 617 people in the UK died as a result of exposure to SHS at work.¹

Children are particularly vulnerable to SHS. Exposure to SHS increases a child's risk of cancer, asthma, bronchitis, middle ear infection, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDs), among other illnesses.²

What does the law say?

Smokefree legislation ensured smoking was no longer permitted in enclosed and substantially enclosed workplaces and public places.

The legislation was implemented on the 1st July, 2007. The smokefree law in England forms part of the Health Act 2006, and followed similar laws that were implemented in Scotland (March 2006), Wales (April 2007), and Northern Ireland (April 2007).

The success of the smokefree legislation has led to further progress. For instance, smoking in cars when a child is present is now prohibited.

How is the law enforced?

Individuals can be fined or prosecuted for offences such as:

- failing to display the required no-smoking signs;
- smoking in a smokefree workplace, public place or vehicle;
- failing to prevent smoking in a smokefree workplace, public place or vehicle.

Within 18 months of implementation, authorities in England found that 98.2% of premises and vehicles were smokefree, and that 89.3% were displaying the correct signage.³

What has Smokefree legislation achieved?

Comprehensive smokefree legislation greatly reduces exposure to SHS, with studies on the exposure of bar-workers showing reductions of 80% to 90%.¹ Whilst the benefits of this are predominantly long-term, we are already beginning to reap the rewards from introducing smokefree laws.

In the year following smokefree legislation, there was a 2.4% reduction in hospital admissions for heart attack. That meant 1,200 fewer emergency admissions in a single year.⁴

In the three years following the law's introduction, there were almost 7,000 fewer hospital admissions for childhood asthma.¹

The smokefree law, and the campaign that supported it, also helped to change attitudes and behaviour on smoking.

An extra 300,000 smokers were inspired to make a quit attempt as the law came into force.⁴

What did the tobacco industry say?

As smokefree laws move through parliament, sources funded by the tobacco industry resorted to scare tactics to argue that the law would not work and would not be supported. But their arguments proved to be off the mark.

The Claims	The facts
'After the [smokefree legislation] more people are going to smoke at home.' - FOREST	The proportion of adults living in a smokefree home was 61% before the legislation. By 2008/9, this had increased to 69%. ⁵
The smokefree legislation is 'particularly culpable' for 'the decimation of the UK pub industry' – Institute of Economic Affairs	Between March 2007 and March 2008, the number of premises with licenses to sell alcohol increased by 4,200. ^{6,7} Following the introduction of the smokefree laws, more people said they went to the pub more often than said they went less often. ⁸

What do the public think?

Support for the smokefree legislation has become yet stronger in the ten years since its introduction. The current level of public support stands at 83%.⁸ The public approve of the effect that the law is having. There is even majority support from those who smoke every day (53% support; 24% oppose).⁹

Ten years on, it's clear that smokefree legislation is a public health success story.

References

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7 Mark Easton, [Pubs aren't dying – they are evolving](#), BBC, July 2009.

8 ONS, [Smoking related behaviour and attitudes 2008/09](#), July 2009.

9 ASH/YouGov, Smokefree GB Survey 2017.