



Lessons from Hong Kong and other countries for outdoor smokefree areas in New Zealand?

On a recent stay in Hong Kong, one of us (NW) noted the striking success of outdoor smoking restrictions (introduced in January 2007¹). No smoking was observed in four smokefree parks and two smokefree beaches, during a total of eight visits to these places (in May 2007). This was despite these outdoor settings being well frequented by adults and during fine weather on all occasions. Furthermore, no cigarette butts were observed in any of these sites. The smokefree signage at the entrances to these outdoor settings was very noticeable and often included large banners (e.g. Figure 1).

Figure 1: Typical signage for an outdoor smokefree area in Hong Kong in May 2007



Hong Kong law bans smoking in the open areas of hospitals (both public and private); open areas of all schools, including university campuses; public bathing beaches; public swimming pools (pool areas and spectator stands); the Hong Kong Stadium, Hong Kong Wetland Park, and Mongkok Stadium (turf pitch areas and spectator stands); and at public transport interchanges.²

The Hong Kong Housing Authority has banned smoking in all common areas of public rental housing estates, from April 2007.³ These common areas of the large estates include 'roads, pedestrian paths, ... gardens, play areas and sports grounds'

with 'no more than five smoking areas on each estate,' ... each of 'about 5 square metres'.⁴

Worldwide, there are a number of jurisdictions where smoking is banned outside on beaches, in parks, playgrounds, stadiums, bus shelters, the outdoor sections of hospitality venues, and in the outdoor areas of the whole town of Calabasas, California.^{1,5} These smokefree areas include all Californian public playgrounds,⁶ and all park, sports fields, playgrounds, beaches, and bus shelters in Mosman, Sydney.⁷ A number of jurisdictions ban smoking near building entrances, including Washington State in the USA.⁸

There are three main arguments in favour of banning smoking in outdoor areas:

- Preventing adverse role-modelling for children;
- Preventing exposure to secondhand smoke; and
- Reducing litter from smoking-related materials.

The example of smoking by adults is a crucial factor in youth starting smoking and quitting.⁹⁻¹⁵ Increased smokefree areas change norms about smoking, and reinforce to smokers and youth the severe risks from tobacco use.¹⁶

The New Zealand Government's *Framework for Reducing Smoking Initiation in Aotearoa-New Zealand*¹⁷ has increased the policy emphasis in New Zealand on reducing the exposure of children to smoking behaviour, in order to reduce smoking uptake. One avenue to decrease this exposure is the introduction of smokefree playgrounds, parks, and other outdoor areas.

Besides the risks from the example of smoking by others, the evidence base around hazardous air pollution from outdoor smoking in various settings is also growing. This work indicates levels of fine particulates (PM_{2.5}) that are sometimes at hazardous levels.¹⁸⁻²¹ There has also been preliminary work on elevated PM_{2.5} levels in outdoor smoking areas of hospitality venues in New Zealand.²²

Smoking-related materials (particularly cigarette butts) are also leading components of litter.²³ Furthermore, discarded butts can constitute a fire-hazard in some outdoor settings.

There is a need to expand the evidence base, for example by conducting evaluations of the outdoor smoking restrictions that have already been introduced in New Zealand. These currently include the grounds of all schools, some council-owned parks (e.g. in South Taranaki and Upper Hutt), the grounds of some hospitals, stadiums, and a university campus (Massey).

Research is also desirable to clarify the potential benefits of reducing outdoor smoking in areas frequented by children (e.g. parks) as part of the long-term denormalisation of smoking and to avoid role-modelling of smoking behaviour.

But while more research is clearly desirable, a precautionary approach suggests a need for further restrictions now, especially for parks and sports fields used by children and for semi-enclosed smoking areas in hospitality settings. We encourage the Cancer Society and the Health Sponsorship Council to continue their work with councils for smokefree parks. There is also a need for additional civil society action to get councils to adopt smokefree by-laws for hospitality settings.

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