

Research paper on secondhand smoke in public should be banned

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Abstract

Studies consistently show that secondhand smoke is dangerous and that communities where smoking bans are implemented can have a greatly reduced incidence of cardiac problems. Understanding what secondhand smoke is and how it effects people is a public concern, because without bans, non-smokers are being forced to risk their health. Communities need to examine the current studies on secondhand smoke and smoking bans to promote the rights of non-smokers.

Secondhand Smoke in Public Should Be Banned

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), smoking causes heart disease which is the number one cause of death in the United States; smoking leads to more deaths than murders, vehicle injuries, alcohol, illegal drugs, HIV, and murders combined each year (Centers for Disease Control n. pag.). The risks for smokers are well known, but there is growing evidence that secondhand smoke is also very dangerous. Smokers argue it is their choice to smoke and their risk to take, but when they smoke in public places, they expose others to the well known dangers. Smoking must be banned in public places to eliminate the health risks for those who choose not to smoke and do not consent to the risks of inhaling secondhand smoke.

Secondhand smoke comes from a variety of sources, including burning cigars, cigarettes, and pipe tobacco; it includes direct exposure where people are currently smoking and also the “aged smoke that lingers after smoking ceases” (Institute of Medicine 1). The National Toxicology program

found that secondhand smoke contains “ at least 250 chemicals known to be toxic or carcinogenic” which can result in lung cancer, heart disease and other diseases even in nonsmokers (Institute of Medicine 15). However, heart disease is still the greatest risk from exposure to secondhand smoke, which it was why cardiovascular problems were the focus for the Institute of Medicine’s study.

Scientists have proven that inhaling secondhand smoke can have the same effects on a person’s heart as it does for some smokers. When nicotine breaks down in the body, it produces a substance called cotinine; British researches followed 2, 000 non-smoking British men for 20 years and found that “ 18% of the men with the highest cotinine levels had developed heart disease — the same percentage as light smokers — compared to 10% of those with the lowest levels” (Harvard Medical School 2004). Therefore, just being around secondhand smoke on a frequent basis can be as dangerous as actually being a smoker.

Without bans on public smoking, children and adults can inhale secondhand smoke in a great variety of locations, including parks, office buildings, parking lots, restaurants, sidewalks, and so forth. Many locations restrict smoking to a particular section or to right outside the building, but these restrictions are not enough to completely prevent exposure to secondhand smoke. Nonsmokers may be forced to walk through an area where smokers congregate, environmental conditions such as wind in the park may bring secondhand smoke to nonsmokers, or poorly designed ventilation systems can circulate smoke throughout a building.

A variety of studies show that smoking bans are effective and good for communities or that secondhand smoke is dangerous. For example, the city of Helena, Montana enacted a law that banned smoking in public venues including bars, restaurants, and offices; during the ban, the number of people seen for heart attacks in the local cardiac center was reduced by fifty percent (Harvard Medical School n. pag.). A study appearing in the January 26, 2011 issue of the journal Tobacco Control reports that “ a reduction in secondhand smoking in American homes was associated with fewer cases of otitis media, the scientific name for middle ear infection” (Harvard School of Public Health n. pag.). However, skeptics and lawmakers may feel that isolated studies, though they present positive evidence that secondhand smoke is dangerous, are not enough by themselves to create smoking bans. In order to best promote public smoking bans, more studies are needed to show their effectiveness. Future surveys of the effect on smoking bans rely in part on there being multiple studies done in different locations to assess their overall effects. In order for these studies to be individually and cumulatively effective, secondhand smoke levels need to be measured before and after a ban is implemented; additionally, “ locations with and without bans should have been compared” (Institute of Medicine 204). As the cumulative evidence from bans towards their effectiveness in promoting health is found, communities will be more likely to implement bans rather than leaving it to businesses or creating simple restrictions.

One reason people choose not to smoke is to reduce their chances of developing deadly diseases. Now that increasing evidence shows that

secondhand smoke is very dangerous, communities must examine the collective evidence, assess non-smokers' rights to choose not be exposed to carcinogens and other hazardous substances, and enact public smoking bans of their own.

Works Cited

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