

Smoke Free Environments

It may not seem too long ago that people were able to smoke freely wherever they wanted, in airplanes, restaurants, hotel rooms, and even hospitals. Eventually, enough people got sick because of their exposure to secondhand smoke that lawmakers started realizing it may help to ban smoking in certain areas.

In 1990, the first indoor public smoking ban in the world was passed in San Luis Obispo, CA. This ban included smoking in restaurants and bars. Since then, many cities, states, and countries have seen the successes of San Luis Obispo and have worked to create smoking bans. More than half of the states have now enacted laws prohibiting public indoor smoking in bars, restaurants, or workplaces, but more work remains to be done; many cities and municipalities have gone one step further and banned smoking in additional public spaces like public parks, playgrounds, sports stadiums, or zoos. These bans are important because despite the fact that they are outdoors, children can easily be exposed to smoke in these places.

Another way to keep indoor air smoke free is to eliminate smoking in public housing. When there are multiple housing units in a building, smoke can easily travel from one unit to another through the pipes, the ventilation system, electrical or plumbing paths, or through elevator shafts or stairwells. One person smoking in a building of residents can put the whole building at risk for illness, including those with vulnerable immune systems, like the elderly, children, or pregnant women. Smoking in private homes and apartment buildings has not yet been challenged by lawmakers, even though children can just as easily be exposed to dangerous secondhand smoke in these settings as well.

The best way to keep your children safe from smoke exposure is to never let anyone smoke near them. Even if your state or town doesn't have a smoke free law, you can choose to patronize businesses with smoke free policies, so that your child will not be exposed to the smoke of strangers. Finally, don't be afraid to speak out in your community for the health of your children, your neighbors, and yourself, to keep the environments in which children live and play free from tobacco smoke. Your actions can make a big difference in protecting the health of your children.

For more information, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics Julius B. Richmond Center Web site at www.richmondcenter.org.