

Smoking Bans as a Chance: New Report on the Protection of Non-Smokers' Health

Smoking bans are a chance, not a restriction. Even many smokers share this view, as is shown in the new report by the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) entitled "Nichtraucherschutz wirkt – eine Bestandsaufnahme der internationalen und der deutschen Erfahrungen" (Non-smoker protection works – An assessment of international and German experiences). The laws on the protection of non-smokers introduced in recent years in Germany have substantially improved the air quality in public places and, in particular, in bars and restaurants. Therefore, these laws are widely accepted among the public.

Once filled with tobacco smoke, the air in bars, pubs and restaurants is now clean thanks to non-smokers' health protection acts. Measurements by DKFZ have shown that pollution by tobacco smoke particles which can penetrate deep into the lung has reduced by about 80 percent from 2005, when smoking was not yet restricted in hospitality establishments in Germany, to 2009, when smoking bans had taken effect throughout Germany.

However, this is only true when smoking is completely prohibited. If there are smoking rooms, tobacco smoke penetrates into smoke-free rooms so that these are polluted four times as much as venues without designated smoking room. Particularly high levels of tobacco smoke pollution are still found in smoking rooms, smoking pubs and clubs. "Employees working in such establishments are still exposed to avoidable high dangers to their health, because tobacco smoke contains a multitude of substances that are toxic, carcinogenic or capable of causing changes in the genetic material," says Dr. Martina Pötschke-Langer, head of the Division of Cancer Prevention and the WHO Collaborating Center for Tobacco Control at DKFZ. "If pregnant women have to work in smoking rooms, the smoke does not only harm the future mother, but also the unborn child – right from the beginning of pregnancy."

Numerous international studies have shown that the introduction of completely smoke-free hospitality establishments leads to a reduction in health problems caused by secondhand smoke in hospitality workers. Thus, particularly in non-smoking hospitality workers, respiratory problems have significantly reduced and pulmonary function has improved.

As a result of exceptions for small pubs and the possibility for larger hospitality businesses to establish smoking rooms, workers in such venues are being turned into second-class employees. After all, in all other establishments smoking has long since been banned completely and their workers have unrestricted protection from the health hazards of tobacco smoke. The health of guests is also adversely affected when smoking is only partially prohibited in the hospitality industry. "Non-smoker protection is consumer protection which the public wants," says Dr. Stefan Etgeton, head of the health and nutrition department of the Federation of German Consumer Organizations. "Over 70 percent of the population in Germany favors smoking bans in bars and restaurants."

The report shows that smokers also have positive experiences with smoking bans. Thus, two thirds of occasional smokers and even 41 percent of regular smokers favor smoke-free bars and restaurants.

Moreover, smoking bans help smokers to reduce their cigarette consumption or even to stop smoking. And ever since it is less permitted to smoke in public places, fewer and fewer smokers tolerate smoking in their own homes: Prior to the introduction of non-smokers'

health protection laws in 2007, 30 percent of smokers had a completely smoke-free home; in 2009, it was already 41 percent. The most important factor influencing smoking behavior at home is the presence of small children. Thus, in 2009 69 percent of smokers with a child younger than five years had a complete smoking ban in their homes; prior to the introduction of non-smoker protection laws it was only 54 percent.

But laws on the protection of non-smokers' health could have yet more far-reaching effects and meet with yet more approval. Exceptions such as the approval of smoking rooms or smoking pubs prevent a complete protection of non-smokers, and diverging regulations in the individual German states lead to injustice and unfair competition in the industry. International and German experience shows that, contrary to prognoses by industry and trade associations, neither dramatic reductions in sales nor massive losses of jobs are to be expected as a result of comprehensive smoking bans.

Therefore, the German Cancer Research Center urgently recommends federal legislation for 100 percent non-smokers' health protection without exceptions for the hospitality industry. Politicians must act.

The report (in German) is available at www.tabakkontrolle.de.

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany and is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers. More than 2,000 staff members, including 850 scientists, are investigating the mechanisms of cancer and are working to identify cancer risk factors. They provide the foundations for developing novel approaches in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer. In addition, the staff of the Cancer Information Service (KID) offers information about the widespread disease of cancer for patients, their families, and the general public. The Center is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (90%) and the State of Baden-Württemberg (10%).

Dr. Stefanie Seltmann
Leiterin Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit
Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum
Im Neuenheimer Feld 280
D-69120 Heidelberg
T: +49 6221 42 2854
F: +49 6221 42 2968
presse@dkfz.de