

Smoke no longer found in European hospitals

September 4 2009

Tobacco use is prohibited in hospitals in many European countries, although levels of compliance with this regulation differ. A study carried out by researchers from the Catalan Institute of Oncology (ICO) has shown for the first time that exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in European hospitals is "low", and "without any notable differences" between them.

Europe wants to see smoking in all closed public places banned by 2012. However, to date only 10 European countries - Spain is not among them - are applying this regulation comprehensively. Now a research study has described the levels of environmental tobacco smoke in European hospitals and has shown for the first time that exposure is "low" and "without any notable differences between them".

The study, carried out in 2001 in 30 hospitals throughout seven European countries (Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Romania and Spain) measured levels of particulates with a diameter of 2.5 microns (known as PM2.5) ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) or below, which indicate the presence of environmental tobacco smoke, at six standard sites in each [hospital](#).

Esteve Fernández, lead author of the study and a researcher at the ICO, tells SINC "it is important to measure compliance with laws by regularly measuring levels of environmental [tobacco smoke](#)". To do this, the experts suggest that national and European regulations to control tobacco addiction should ban smoking in health establishments without any

exceptions.

In total, 199 PM2.5 measurements were taken, 30 of them in the vestibules of main hospital entrances, 29 in casualty department waiting rooms, 22 in medical hospitalisation units, 27 in cafeterias, 22 on fire escape stairways, 22 in general surgery hospitalisation units, and 39 in other places, including eight smokers' areas (in Belgium and Greece).

The results, which have appeared recently in the *European Respiratory Journal*, show that the average level of PM2.5 micro particles in all the countries was 3.0µg/m³, with half of the measurements being between 2.0 and 7.0µg/m³. Eleven of the measurements (5.5%) revealed levels of particulates of more than 25.0µg/m³, which is the limit recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for external air quality.

Most of the countries studied had introduced specific smoking bans in health establishments at the time of the study, although some of these bans allowed smoking in certain places, or even in the cafeterias.

More information: E. Fernández, C. Martínez, M. Fu, J.M. Martínez-Sánchez, M.J. López, G. Invernizzie, A. Ouranou, B. Dautzenberg y M. Nebot. "Second-hand smoke exposure in a sample of European hospitals". *European Respiratory Journal*; 34: 111 julio de 2009.

Source: FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

Citation: Smoke no longer found in European hospitals (2009, September 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-09-longer-european-hospitals.html>

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