

# China renews push to ban smoking starting May 1

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A Chinese man smokes in front of a pillar with a no smoking notice on display at a bus station in Beijing Thursday, March 24, 2011. On this week, Chinese health authorities renewed a push to ban smoking in indoor public places, adding more venues like hotels and restaurants as of May 1, though still excluding many workplaces. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

(AP) -- Chinese health authorities are renewing a push to ban smoking in indoor public places, adding more venues like hotels and restaurants as of May 1, though still excluding many workplaces.

The guidelines given on the Health Ministry's website are the latest effort to curb [tobacco use](#) in the country with the world's largest number of smokers and where experts say huge revenues from the state-owned tobacco monopoly hinders anti-smoking measures.

Smoking, which is linked to the deaths of at least 1 million people in China every year, is one of the greatest health threats the country faces, government statistics show. Nearly 30 percent of adults in China smoke, about 300 million people - a number roughly equal to the entire U.S. population.

The guidelines released this week are part of the Health Ministry's regulations on health management in public places - a set of rules that also covers areas including ventilation, use of disinfectants, air quality and pest control.

Dr. Yang Gonghuan, deputy director of the official Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention and a prominent anti-smoking advocate, said the new rules were a significant step forward but more needed to be done.

"A higher level of legislation is needed to make this ban more effective," such as dedicated anti-smoking laws at the national or city levels, Yang said.

Dr. Sarah England, head of the World Health Organization's Tobacco Free Initiative in China, says the new rules cover a broader array of venues than previous guidelines issued in 1991, but that the definition of "public places" excludes government offices and other workplaces.

"However, it takes an important step in moving the country towards a comprehensive, national smoke-free policy, and could help set a bar for tougher sub-national legislation," England said.

The older regulations listed venues such as movie theaters, concert halls, libraries and shopping malls in which smoking was prohibited. The new list adds hotels, restaurants, cafes, bars, hair and beauty salons and other places.

The new regulations call for no-smoking signs to be put up in public places, and require owners or managers of venues considered public places to allocate staff to persuade smokers to give up the habit.

Enforcement of such regulations is bound to be an issue in a society in which smoking is so entrenched that almost half of all male doctors smoke and cigarette cartons are commonly exchanged as gifts. People commonly light up in hospital waiting rooms, video game arcades and even on domestic flights, despite set of regulations from 1991 that prohibit smoking in such places.

The new guidelines include fines of up to 30,000 yuan (\$4,600) for some violations, but the Health Ministry was not specific. It was unclear if that maximum fine would apply to smoking violations or to other regulations included in the new guidelines.

China has already missed a Jan. 9, 2011, deadline to ban smoking at public indoor venues, in accordance with a WHO-backed global anti-tobacco treaty.

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