

China's new indoor smoking ban takes effect

May 1 2011

(AP) -- China's latest push to ban smoking in indoor public venues came into effect Sunday, but the vaguely defined expanded rules were not expected to dramatically reduce the country's heavy tobacco addiction.

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 Health Ministry in late March released amended guidelines on the management of public places that now ban smoking in more venues like hotels and restaurants, though still excluding workplaces. The rules were set for implementation on May 1.

But state media reports have cast doubt on the effectiveness of the ban, with the official Xinhua News Agency citing experts as saying that it is likely to be ignored by [smokers](#) and operators of public places because it fails to specify punishments for violators.

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. Experts say huge revenues from the state-owned tobacco monopoly hinders anti-smoking measures.

Dr. Yang Gonghuan, director of China's National Office of Tobacco Control, said despite problems with the new rules, she remained hopeful

that they could raise awareness of tobacco control efforts. She said her office is not responsible for implementing the rules.

"I also acknowledge that there are imperfections in the Health Ministry's current guidelines, and that preparations for carrying it out have also been insufficient," Yang said. "But I think we should all come together to help push forward the regulation's implementation."

The rules 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.

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 regulations from 1991 that prohibit smoking in such places.

The revised 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 stop patrons from [smoking](#).

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