

Study: Campus smoking ban reduced students' smoking, changed attitudes

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Smoking bans have become more common on university campuses, but do they work? Do they help reduce smoking in this newly independent age group? According to an Indiana University study, they do.

A campus [smoking ban](#) -- lightly enforced at that -- significantly reduced student [smoking](#) during a two-year period and changed students' attitudes toward smoking regulations, according to a study that examined students' smoking behaviors on two similar campuses -- one with (Indiana) and one without (Purdue) a campus-wide smoke-free air policy.

"Although we haven't pinpointed which element of the campus-wide smoke-free air policy contributed the most to the positive changes in students' smoking rates, having such a policy in place does appear to influence students' smoking-related norms and behaviors even without strong enforcement of the policy," said Dong-Chul Seo, associate professor in IU's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. "These results are encouraging for university administrators considering stronger tobacco control policies."

Despite growing concerns about the harmful effects of second-hand smoke, as college student smoking rates hover around 20 percent, this study by IU tobacco control and [health behaviors](#) experts is the first published report to evaluate the impact of smoke-free campus policies on student smoking. It found that not only did the student smoking rates drop after the campus-wide smoking ban was implemented, but those who continued smoking consumed fewer cigarettes.

The study, "The effect of a smoke-free campus policy on college students' smoking behaviors and attitudes," appeared online in the journal *Preventive Medicine*. Co-authors are Jonathan T. Macy, Mohammad R. Torabi and Susan E. Middlestadt, all from the Department of Applied Health Science in IU's School of HPER.

The researchers chose to study students at Purdue University and Indiana University Bloomington because of the numerous demographic similarities between the students at each campus and because West Lafayette and Bloomington both had comprehensive city-wide smoke-free air policies during the two-year study, which ended in 2009.

More findings from the study:

- The percentage of students smoking at IU dropped by 3.7 percentage points during the study to 12.8 percent, while the smoking rate increased slightly at Purdue to 10.1 percent.
- The number of cigarettes (5.9) students reported smoking at IU decreased during the study but increased at Purdue (6.8).
- The perception by students that 26 percent or more of their peers smoked decreased at IU but increased by almost 8 percentage points at Purdue. When asked if two or more of their closest friends smoked, the rate decreased to 38.7 percent at IU but increased to 34.4 percent at Purdue.
- IU saw a drop in the percentage of IU students who thought smoking among students was OK and that most people believed students should be able to smoke. A smaller percentage of Purdue students agreed that smoking among students was acceptable but the percentage of students who thought most people believed students should be allowed to smoke increased by 7 percentage points.
- The percentage of IU students who agreed that regulating

smoking in public places is good increased to 82.1 percent during the study period but decreased at Purdue to 81.5 percent. The percentage of IU [students](#) supporting a campus smoking ban increased by 5 percentage points to 62.5 percent while it decreased slightly at Purdue to 61.3 percent.

Seo said he was somewhat surprised by the reduced smoking rate at IU because the campus-wide smoke-free air policy was not actively enforced and people can be seen smoking on a regular basis.

"The positive changes may be attributable to increased awareness of the policy due to signage, media coverage, and a campus bus completely wrapped with anti-tobacco messaging," he said.

Provided by Indiana University

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