

Germany's most populous state toughens smoking ban

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(AP)—Germany's most populous state is toughening a ban on smoking in bars and restaurants, closing loopholes in its five-year-old restrictions.

North Rhine-Westphalia, a western region of about 18 million people that includes Cologne, Bonn, Duesseldorf and the Ruhr industrial area, introduced its [smoking ban](#) in 2008—around the same time other German states put similar restrictions into effect.

The state legislature on Thursday approved a toughened version to take effect next May. It shuts loopholes that allowed customers to light up in establishments that designated themselves smoking bars, in special rooms set aside for [smokers](#) or in beer tents, among other things. The center-left state government said the original ban had so many [loopholes](#) it didn't effectively protect nonsmokers.

In future, exceptions will be allowed only for private parties.

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