

Study finds smokefree playground policies can make a difference

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British and New Zealand playgrounds have a significantly smaller proportion of people smoking than other types of public outdoor areas, according to latest research from the University of Otago, Wellington.

New Zealand playgrounds and streets also have less smoking than in Britain, but outdoor transport waiting areas have more.

The University of Otago researchers have been developing and testing simple methods that can be used by anyone for determining the proportion of smoking in outdoor public places.

Observations of almost 5000 [adolescents](#) and adults were made at 91 sites across England, Scotland and New Zealand. The proportion of people seen smoking in British playgrounds was 2.8%, compared to 0% in New Zealand, although butts were found in the New Zealand playgrounds.

The proportion seen smoking in British streets and pedestrian areas was 7.3%, compared to 3% in New Zealand. However, 11% were smoking in New Zealand outdoor transport waiting areas, compared to 7% in Britain.

Lead researcher, Associate Professor George Thomson, says that the more widespread smokefree playground policies in New Zealand may explain the lack of people smoking in [playgrounds](#) compared to Britain.

He says that the methods developed through this research will help community groups demonstrate the level of smoking in different areas, and provide scientific evidence for local authorities to advance smokefree outdoor policies. The methods can also determine the number of children exposed to smoking normalisation.

"Smokefree outdoor areas help [smokers](#) to quit, help those who have quit to stay quit, and reduce the normalisation of smoking for children and youth. They also reduce litter, [water pollution](#) and cleaning costs for local authorities and ratepayers."

A co-researcher, Dr Marie Russell, says the results show the need for policies to protect people from the health risks of second-hand smoke in bus queues, transport shelters and other outdoor transport waiting areas.

In Australia, California, Japan and other places, there is an increasing adoption of smokefree streets by [local authorities](#). A number of jurisdictions similarly protect people in outdoor transport waiting areas from [smoking](#).

This study has been published in the international journal *Health & Place*.

Provided by University of Otago

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