

Putin signs law banning smoking in public places

February 25 2013, by Stuart Williams

President Vladimir Putin has signed a law banning smoking in public places in Russia from June, a cornerstone of the government's bid to improve public health in the nicotine-addicted country, the Kremlin said Monday.

The move follows similar anti-smoking legislation adopted in the last years by several EU states, but will require a major lifestyle change for Russians long used to smoking almost anywhere they liked.

The law, which will take effect in two stages, makes smoking illegal in restaurants, cafes, hotels, trains and a host of other places.

From June 1, 2013, it will be illegal to smoke in Russia on municipal transport, at railway stations, in lifts and bus stations, administrative buildings as well as any place of education or health.

From June 1, 2014, the ban will be stepped up to include ships, long-distance trains, train platforms, hotels, cafes and restaurants, places where Russians still smoke plentifully.

Many Russians currently get through long-distance train journeys by smoking at the end of carriages where smoking is allowed despite being banned in compartments.

Very few restaurants and cafes are completely non-smoking, sometimes offering, at best, a smoking area and non-smoking area that is sometimes

tucked away in an unappealing section at the back.

The law will also ban the advertising of tobacco products as well as sponsorship of events by tobacco firms. It will also forbid laying out cigarette packs openly in store displays or selling them in kiosks.

The law, called "On protecting the health of citizens from the danger of passive smoking and the consequences of the use of tobacco", was adopted by the State Duma lower house on February 12 and the Federation Council upper house on February 20.

Over 40 percent of the adult population in Russia are believed to be smokers and the authorities admit that their failure to take firm action on the issue has turned smoking into a major public health problem.

The health industry estimates that lower life expectancy caused by smoking costs the budget an estimated 1.2 trillion rubles (\$40 billion), or 6.3 percent of the country's GDP.

"Specialists believe that the law will greatly improve the situation and within the next 10-15 years will cut in half the amount of smoking in Russia," a health ministry official told the Interfax news agency.

The health ministry is also hoping that the law will cut the number of annual deaths in Russia from smoking from the current 400,000 to 150,000-200,000.

Vastly more men than women smoke in Russia, with 60 percent of males smoking and just 20 percent of women, according to the World Health Organisation.

According to the WHO, Russia in 2010 had the fourth most smokers of any country in the world, accounting for 4.4 percent of the world's

smokers. However it was still well behind China, which accounted for 28 percent of the world's smokers.

Neither Putin nor Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev are smokers. However Medvedev is surrounded by several chain-smoking ministers in the cabinet such as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

When he was serving as Russia's ambassador to the United Nations in New York in 2003, Lavrov famously made a huge public fuss after a smoking ban was imposed on all UN premises.

Improving public health through limiting smoking is a major priority for the Kremlin as it battles a major demographic crisis that saw the Russian population shrink after the fall of the Soviet Union.

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