

# Philippine's Duterte imposes public smoking ban

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Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has signed an executive order that will impose a wide-ranging ban on smoking in public, reinforcing some of the toughest anti-tobacco measures in Asia.

Smoking cigarettes will be banned in many public places, while selling tobacco within 100 metres (330 feet) of schools and other areas where children gather could attract jail terms, according to the order published late Thursday.

Duterte, a firebrand leader most famous for waging a war on drugs in which thousands of people have died, had promised immediately after becoming president last year to introduce the smoking ban as part of a range of measures to impose more order on society.

Other measures included a ban on singing karaoke at night and a 2:00 am curfew on drinking alcohol in public, although these have yet to be implemented.

Duterte rose to prominence as the longtime mayor of the southern city of Davao, which he said he transformed from being crime-ridden into one of the nation's most liveable and safe urban centres.

However his critics have said Duterte has supplanted the rule of law with his war on drugs, alleging he has triggered a killing spree by police and vigilantes who have been spurred on by his calls for tens of thousands of people to die.

The order had been reported in some media as a blanket ban on smoking in public places.

However the order did not make that clear and health department spokesman Eric Tayag said the exact areas to be banned would be announced later, with the order set to become law in 60 days.

Nevertheless, the order did state that smoking would be banned in all "enclosed" public places, which are defined as having a roof and at least one wall.

This means it will cover all public buildings, such as workplaces and malls. However there will be designated smoking areas allowed inside these buildings.

Smoking will also be banned on all forms of public transport.

## **Punishments**

People who smoke in banned areas will face a fine of 500 pesos (\$10) for a first offence, rising to a maximum of 10,000 pesos (\$200) for a third strike, according to the order.

People who sell tobacco products in banned places could be jailed for up to three years, the order said.

The Philippines already has a ban on tobacco advertising, as well as a law that requires graphic images of smoking health hazards to be printed on cigarette packaging.

Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino, also introduced hefty taxes on smoking.

These have helped to see smoking rates fall in the Philippines.

About 23.8 percent of the adult population smoked in 2015, down from 28.3 percent in 2009, according to government surveys.

The World Health Organization praised Duterte's plans, although it cautioned that they still relied on local governments enforcing them and that was not guaranteed.

"WHO welcomes the Philippine initiative on a nationwide ban on smoking," Dr Florante Trinidad, who works on the WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative in the Philippines, said in an e-mail to AFP.

Health Justice, a local anti-smoking group, also lauded the initiative but said it did not go far enough, pointing to a provision that allowed for designated smoking areas inside buildings.

"As health advocates, we want the national policy that does not provide for indoor smoking areas," Health Justice managing director Beverly Samson told AFP.

For Duterte, 72, an ex-smoker, the ban is personal.

The leader has said repeatedly he contracted Buerger's disease, an incurable illness affecting arteries and veins which causes great pain, because of his years of smoking, and that was one of the reasons he wanted to introduce the ban.

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