

# Japan OKs first anti-smoking law, but seen as lax and partial

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In this Friday, May 9, 2014, file photo, people smoke at a designated area in Tokyo. Japan has approved its first national legislation banning smoking inside of public facilities, but the measure excludes many restaurants and bars and is seen as toothless. The legislation aims to lower secondhand smoking risks ahead of 2020 Tokyo Olympics amid international calls for smoke-free games, but was largely watered down by the reluctant ruling party. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

Japan on Wednesday approved its first national legislation banning smoking inside of public facilities, but the watered-down measure excludes many restaurants and bars and is seen as toothless.

The legislation aims to lower secondhand smoking risks ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics amid international calls for a smoke-free Games. But ruling party lawmakers with strong ties to the tobacco and [restaurant](#) industries opted for a weakened version.

The upper house approved and enacted the bill into law Wednesday after it was approved earlier by the lower house.

Last month, Tokyo separately enacted a stricter ordinance banning smoking at all eateries that have employees, to protect them from [secondhand smoke](#). The ordinance will cover about 84 percent of Tokyo restaurants and bars.

But the law still allows many exceptions and the Tokyo Games may not be fully smoke-free.

Japan often has been called a smokers' paradise. Until now it has had no binding law controlling secondhand smoke. That has brought pressure from international Olympics officials.

The new national law bans indoor smoking at schools, hospitals and [government](#) offices. Smoking will be allowed at existing small eateries, including those with less than 100 square meters (1,076 square feet) of customer space, which includes more than half of Japanese establishments. Larger and new eateries must limit smoking to designated rooms.

Violators can face fines of up to 300,000 yen (\$2,700) for smokers and up to 500,000 yen (\$4,500) for facility managers.

It will be implemented in phases through April 2020.

The health ministry's initial draft bill called for stricter measures but

faced opposition from lawmakers sympathetic to the restaurant industry. The government also was viewed as opposed to harsher measures because the former monopoly Japan Tobacco is still partly state-owned.

In Japan, almost a fifth of adults still smoke. The rate for men in their 30s to 50s is nearly twice as high, according to a government survey last year.

Most office workers now light up only in smoking rooms or outdoors, and cities are gradually imposing limits on outdoor smoking in public areas. But most restaurants and bars in Japan allow [smoking](#), making them the most common public source of secondhand smoke.

In Japan, about 15,000 people, mainly women and children, die annually due to secondhand smoke, according to estimates by the government and the World Health Organization.

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