

## New York's war on tobacco produces record fall in smoking

Scott Gottlieb *New York*

A large increase in the tax on cigarettes and a ban on smoking in bars and restaurants are being credited with contributing to an 11% decline in the number of adult smokers in New York city from 2002 to 2003—one of the steepest short term declines ever measured, according to surveys commissioned by the city.

The surveys show that the number of regular smokers, after holding steady for a decade, dropped by more than 100 000 over the period. It is estimated that 19.3% of adults in New York now smoke, down from 21.6%. The decline occurred across all boroughs, ages, and ethnic groups.

The surveys also found a 13% decline in cigarette consumption, indicating that smokers who did not quit were smoking less. The surveys counted as smokers all

people who said they had smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lives and now smoked every day or on "some days."

City health officials and opponents of smoking said they believed the decline was caused mainly by sharply higher tobacco taxes that went into effect in 2002, including an increase in the city's portion of the tax from eight cents (£0.04; €0.07) a pack to \$1.50 a pack. The decline also coincided with a new city law banning smoking in bars, a new state law prohibiting it in restaurants and bars, and a citywide antismoking campaign, which has included distribution of free nicotine patches.

"From what we've seen, we believe New York city experienced the steepest decline anywhere in one year," said Dr Thomas Frieden, the city's health commissioner.

The nicotine patch programme, a one-time giveaway by the city of six week supplies of nicotine patches to 35 000 New Yorkers last year, was notably successful, according to a report released by the New York Department of Health last month. Eleven thousand of the participants are now ex-smokers.

"The results far exceeded our expectations," Dr Frieden said.

However, another recent report found that a third of smokers in New York are avoiding paying the \$1.50 cigarette tax, leading the city's health commissioner to warn that smuggled cigarettes were "the single biggest threat" to the city's tough antismoking law.

Cigarette sales in the five boroughs collapsed after the city increased its portion of the tax on 2 July 2002. In the next

12 months 182 million packs were sold, compared with 342 million in the previous 12 months.

Sandra Mullin, a health department spokeswoman, said two thirds of smokers who responded to a recent survey said they are buying their cigarettes legally. "Others are purchasing cigarettes from sources such as Indian reservations, through the internet, outside the US, from other states, [and] through the mail," she said. □



STEPHEN CHERNINGETTY IMAGES

Before New York city's smoking ban and increase in tobacco tax, 21.6% of residents smoked. Now 19.3% do so

## One hospitality worker a week dies from passive smoking, study shows

Rebecca Coombes *London*

One employee a week in the UK hospitality industry dies from passive smoking at work, according to new estimates.

Professor Konrad Jamrozik of Imperial College, London, calculated the figure from the number of employees in the industry, their exposure to tobacco smoke, and their likely risk of dying as a result.

He worked on the basis that for a worker in a bar or restaurant exposure to secondhand smoke is three times higher than the average non-smoker who is married to a smoker. "Passive smoking at work kills almost twice as many as exposure at home," he concluded.

He also estimated that environmental tobacco smoke in the workplace generally causes about 700 deaths a year in the United Kingdom.

Professor Jamrozik's findings were presented at a conference

this week on environmental tobacco smoke and the hospitality industry, held at the Royal College of Physicians, London.

Although the number of people who work in a smoke-free environment has risen by 10% since 1996 to 50%, about 1 in 10 employees still work in areas with no restrictions on smoking. Most of these are in the hospitality sector.

John Britton, professor of epidemiology at the University of Nottingham and chairman of the college's Tobacco Advisory Group, presented UK poll data to show that smoke-free policies are likely to increase business, not reduce it.

Quoting from the recent Office for National Statistics' omnibus survey of nearly 4000 people, he said that more than 80% supported a ban on smoking in restaurants.

A Mori poll of more than 2000 people from September 2003 found that nearly half favoured an outright ban on smoking indoors in public places.

"The surveys show that most people in this country who are smokers don't want to be. Only 30% are happy to be smokers or are resigned to it. By making it more difficult for people to smoke you are inspiring them to do something they want to do anyway," Professor Britton said.

"The poll is clear that three quarters of people say a ban would make no difference about whether they use a pub or restaurant. The proportion that says [they would use it] 'less' is 8%, and those who say 'more' is 17%. So roughly twice as many are likely to come into a bar or restaurant than leave it—so, on balance, good for business," he said.

Professor Britton said he was "completely baffled" as to why the government had not banned smoking on NHS premises. He said the Department of Health itself only became smoke-free last year. "If you ask the department at the highest level they say

it is because they don't like telling NHS institutions what to do. That's news to me."

There are some high profile examples of smoke-free public areas in the United Kingdom, including Gateshead's Metro Centre, the Pizza Hut restaurants, and 12 000 outlets of McDonald's. But there has been widespread failure to implement the voluntary code agreed by the Department of Health and the hospitality industry. Out of 56 000 pubs in England, only 53% are reported as complying with the code. Only 26 pubs were smoke-free.

Richard Edwards, of the School of Epidemiology and Health Sciences, University of Manchester Medical School, poured scorn on the voluntary approach.

"Compliance with the code includes allowing smoking everywhere, as long as you put up a sign [saying smoking is allowed]."

He said more than half (56%) of the pubs that complied with the code allowed smoking throughout without ventilation. □