



Media release

It is time for a national smoke-free law in China: new WHO report

Beijing law provides momentum towards national smoking ban

BEIJING, 19 October 2015 – A strong, comprehensive, national smoke-free law would protect all of China’s 1.34 billion citizens from the harms of second-hand tobacco smoke, and would be immensely popular with the public, including smokers, according to a new report launched today.

These findings are presented alongside policy recommendations in *Smoke-free policies in China – Evidence of effectiveness and implications for action*, from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project) and the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“China’s addiction to tobacco is taking a dreadful toll on its health, its society, and its economy. And China’s smokers are not only hurting themselves, but also their friends, family, and others around them. The rates of exposure to second-hand smoke are extraordinarily high, with devastating health consequences for those affected,” said Dr Bernhard Schwartländer, WHO Representative in China.

“But it doesn’t have to be this way. There is a solution – and it starts with the adoption of a national smoke-free law. A national smoke-free law is the only way to effectively protect all of China’s population from the harms of tobacco smoke – and the report we are releasing today demonstrates the urgent importance of this,” Dr Schwartländer said.

More than 1 million people die each year in China from tobacco-related illnesses. If current smoking habits continue, this number is expected to triple by the year 2050.

In addition, involuntary exposure to second-hand smoke endangers the health of hundreds of millions of people in China every day. According to the report, 740 million non-smokers – including 182 million children – are exposed to second-hand smoke at least once a day in a typical week. Approximately 100,000 people die in China every year as a result. Second-hand smoke can make indoor venues more polluted than the air outside even on the most heavily polluted days.

“China is unfortunately a world leader in second-hand smoke exposure: among the countries we work in, China has the highest rates of smoking in workplaces and homes, and among the highest rates in restaurants and bars. This puts the health of millions of non-smokers at risk every single day,” said Dr Geoffrey T. Fong, Principal Investigator, ITC Project.

“Other countries have taken strong action to protect non-smokers from the smoke of others. When comprehensive smoking bans are effectively implemented and supported, indoor smoking virtually disappears,” Dr Fong explained.

The winds of change are blowing in China: on 1 June this year, a comprehensive smoke-free law came into effect in the nation’s capital. The law is the strongest smoke-free law adopted in China, and requires all indoor places, including workplaces, restaurants, hotels and airports to be 100%



smoke-free, without any exceptions. Beijing's smoke-free law sets an excellent precedent for other Chinese cities, and provides important momentum for the adoption of a national smoke-free law.

"Beijing's comprehensive law sets an example for all of China. Although there have been some smoke-free policies in other Chinese cities, they have been partial and poorly enforced. We need stronger laws, effective enforcement and mass education campaigns to educate people about the dangers of inhaling second-hand smoke," said Dr Xiaofeng Liang, Deputy Director, China CDC.

Crucially, the report demonstrates that there is likely to be strong popular support for a national smoke-free law. The ITC Project data shows that even smokers are supportive of smoke-free laws, particularly in workplaces. Support for smoke-free bars amongst smokers is higher in China than it was in other countries, such as Ireland, Scotland (United Kingdom), and France before such smoking bans were introduced.

"This is a critically important finding. It shows that lawmakers have nothing to fear from the adoption of a national smoke-free law. On the contrary: a comprehensive national smoke-free law is likely to be extremely popular in China, even among smokers themselves, as we have already seen in Beijing. It is time to get this done," Dr Schwartländer said.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which came into force in China in 2006, requires that countries adopt laws and regulations to protect against exposure to second-hand smoke in all indoor public places. As well as protecting against harms caused by second-hand smoke, smoke-free laws also help to reduce tobacco consumption and motivate smokers to quit the deadly habit.

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Note to editors:

The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project)

The evidence presented in the report is primarily based on findings from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project), the first-ever international cohort study to evaluate the psychosocial and behavioural effects of tobacco control policies and the only research project that focuses on measuring the impact of key policies of the WHO FCTC.

The ITC Project conducts surveys of smokers and non-smokers in China and 21 other countries. Four waves of ITC China Survey data have been collected between 2006 and 2012 from 5600 adult smokers and 1400 non-smokers in seven cities in China. Findings from the ITC China Survey and other ITC countries can provide policy-makers with a roadmap to guide the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive smoke-free law.

Download the full report: http://www.wpro.who.int/china/tobacco_report_20151019_en.pdf

About the World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.

About the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC)

China CDC is a nonprofit institution working in the fields of disease control and prevention, public health management and provision of service. China CDC is committed to strengthening research on strategies and measures for disease control and prevention; organizing and implementing control and prevention plans for different kinds of diseases; carrying out public health management; acting as the national working group for disease prevention, emergency relief, and construction of public health information systems.

For more information please contact:

Ms WU Linlin

WHO China Office, Beijing

E-mail: wul@wpro.who.int

Office Tel: +86 10 6532 7191