

Smoking in Public Places

Secondhand tobacco smoke has a massive impact on people with asthma. Not only can it make asthma worse, but research has found it can actually cause asthma.

- Even at low levels of exposure, secondhand smoke is associated with asthma symptoms.¹
- Secondhand smoke is a major asthma trigger, reduces lung function and causes more frequent attacks.²
- Research published at the end of 2003 concluded that secondhand smoke also causes asthma in adults. For people exposed to asthma at work the risk of developing adult onset asthma is doubled, for people exposed to asthma in the home the risk is increased five fold.³

Research from Asthma UK Scotland has found that:

- 82% of people with asthma say that other people's smoke makes their asthma worse
- 55% of parents of children with asthma avoided restaurants and places with smoky atmospheres
- 40% of adults with asthma avoid smoky pubs and restaurants
- Secondhand smoke is the second most common asthma trigger in the workplace
- 1 in 5 people with asthma feel excluded from parts of their workplace where people smoke

Asthma UK Scotland understands that prohibiting smoking in public places will cause concern for smokers and other industries such as restaurant owners. However, we believe that the overwhelming health arguments outweigh these personal liberty arguments put forward by smokers, particularly when compared with the personal liberty of people with asthma, who have a right to go to a restaurant without fear of having an asthma attack.

This may lead some to consider alternative approaches such as smoke free areas or ventilation systems. However, scientific research has shown that neither of these measures is effective.

¹ Sturm JJ, Yeatts K et al. (2004)

² BMA report: Towards smoke-free public places Nov 2002, page 4

³ Jaakkola MS, Piipari R, Jaakkola N, Jaakkola JJ. Environmental tobacco smoke and adult-onset asthma: a population-based incident case-control study. *Am J Public Health*, 2003; 93:2055-2060.

Smoke free areas have been compared to swimming in the chlorine free half of a swimming pool. It simply does not exist. Smoke free areas are still contaminated by cigarette smoke and the carcinogens and toxins that it contains.

Ventilation systems have also been suggested as a possible way forward. Again, scientific research has shown that ventilation systems are simply not effective in removing toxins and carcinogens from the air.⁴ We welcome the recognition given to this in the consultation document produced by the Executive.

Conclusion

Preventing smoking in public places is the only way that we can protect people from the adverse effects of secondhand smoke. Other measures that try to find common ground between interest groups, such as ventilation or smoke free areas are a compromise, and a compromise that is dangerous to health. While in politics we often try to find a common path, or a compromise that brings different groups together, on this issue such a policy could lead to solutions that are detrimental to health and therefore cannot be pursued.

Asthma UK Scotland supported the voluntary code on tobacco control as a stage in the progression towards smoke free public places. The voluntary code has been shown to be ineffectual, therefore, in order to protect the health of the population of Scotland, we must now go further.

Asthma UK Scotland therefore supports smoke free public places as a positive way forward in improving the health of people in Scotland, and in particular those people with asthma.

A Personal Perspective

Elaine has asthma and explains how smoking in pubs and restaurants affects her life:

“About 14 years ago and after a very healthy and busy social life where I played squash for my university and ran up the hills of Snowdonia I developed late onset asthma. How life changed! The most vicious trigger was cigarette smoke and so overnight I became a prisoner in my own home. I could not go with my friends and family to pubs, parties or restaurants. They all found this hard but not half as hard as I did. Imagine declining all meals out, going to pubs with friends, school/ parent socials and parties. Sometimes I would sit at home alone and send my husband out to enjoy himself because I didn't see why he should be a victim too. I pathetically looked forward to the annual Christian Aid Ceilidh in the local Church hall because smoking was not allowed. I sometimes became very angry at the ignorant rhetoric in the papers about the rights of smokers. They have no right whatsoever to pollute

⁴ “Towards smoke free public places,” BMA, November 2002

Asthma UK Adviceline
Ask an asthma nurse specialist
08457 01 02 03
asthma.org.uk/adviceline
asthma.org.uk
enquiries@asthma.org.uk

Asthma UK Scotland
2a North Charlotte Street
Edinburgh EH2 4HR
T 0131 226 2544
F 0131 226 2401



the air I or any other person breathes. Restricted areas are not effective as the smoke is still hanging in the air, evidenced by how people smell when they come out! Eventually I found a non-smoking restaurant in Edinburgh called Parrots and took all my friends and family there. More recently others have sprung up, probably about three and of course Starbucks are all non smoking so at least we can go for a coffee now. The first non smoking pub/restaurant in Edinburgh has emerged and this is great news.”

Elaine goes on and asks:

“Please can we have a ban on smoking in public places? At the moment many people with asthma have had their choice and freedom of movement removed. With a ban, people who smoke can still choose where to go however their choice to pollute the air we breathe will be removed. That is justice.”