



Smoking Sucks! 6 States That Need to Change Their Tobacco Laws

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By now, there's little doubt in anyone's mind that smoking is dangerous both to smokers and those around them, though that doesn't stop 40 million American adults from lighting up almost every day. Banning cigarettes outright might encourage people to kick the habit, but a blanket prohibition on smoking seems unlikely to happen any time soon. Rather than focusing on banning cigarettes themselves, states (along with cities and the federal government) have passed various tobacco laws making it more difficult for people to smoke. They've raised taxes on tobacco, banned smoking in many public and private spaces, and required warning labels on packs of cigarettes.

Evidence suggests these laws do help to curb smoking. Cigarette use falls after the introduction of smoke-free workplace laws and policies, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Increases in cigarette taxes also seem to discourage people from smoking, though the decline might not be as dramatic as lawmakers sometimes like to imply, research has found. In areas where smoking is banned in public places, heart attacks and other cardiac problems are less common.

Despite evidence that these laws do help to reduce smoking and improve public health (not to mention increase tax revenues), not all states have rushed to embrace anti-smoking legislation. While dozens of states have bans on smoking in public spaces and others levy taxes of \$3 to \$4 per pack of smokes, a handful of states have taken a hands-off approach to regulating smoking. Though more restrictive local tobacco laws may exist, in these states, cigarette taxes are low, smoking bans less extensive, and smokers are still able to light up with relative freedom.

1. Missouri

Missouri is the best state in the country for tobacco freedom, according to the libertarian Cato Institute. Show-Me State residents enjoy the lowest cigarette taxes in the country — 17 cents per pack, well below the national average of \$1.65 per pack, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Smoking is banned in enclosed public spaces statewide, but there are several exceptions, including bars and restaurants that seat less than 50 people and bowling alleys, note

the American Lung Association's (ALA) Tobacco Policy Project (TPP). There is no statewide ban on smoking in workplaces. The ALA gave the state an "F" in both smoke-free air laws and state tobacco taxes.

2. Kentucky

Kentucky is a tobacco state, though the industry has less of a presence there than it once did, with many farmers no longer planting the once-dominant crop. So it's not surprising that tobacco laws are relatively loose here. The state has no statewide ban on smoking in public places, but cities and towns are allowed to pass laws further restricting smoking. Smoking is not specifically banned in childcare facilities and restaurants, but it isn't allowed in schools and hospitals. Cigarette taxes are just 60 cents a pack. Kentucky also has one of the highest smoking rates in the U.S., with about 26% of adults regularly lighting up, according to the CDC.

3. Virginia

Philip Morris USA – one of the biggest tobacco companies in the world – is headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, the state's capital. Accordingly, the state's anti-smoking laws are fairly weak. It ranks number 3 in the U.S. for tobacco freedom, according to the Cato Institute, and it has the second-lowest cigarette tax in the country, at 30 cents per pack. Smoking is prohibited in schools, day care centers, and state government buildings. Smoking in restaurants is allowed provided it happens in an area that's separately ventilated.

Unlike some states, local governments are not permitted to pass smoking laws that are more restrictive than the state-wide regulations, according to the TPP. The state did recently pass a law banning smoking in cars if a child under the age of 8 was a passenger.

4. Georgia

Georgia ranks second in the U.S. for tobacco freedom, per the Cato Institute. Cigarette taxes are 37 cents per pack. Smoking is banned in many public places, including health care facilities and schools, and in most enclosed areas at workplaces. Smoking is allowed in bars provided they're not open to people under the age of 18, and in designated areas of restaurants, such as outdoor patios or enclosed private rooms. However, since the state's "smoke-free" law passed in 2005, the percentage of bars and restaurants permitting smoking has almost doubled due to loopholes in the law, a 2015 study found.

5. Wyoming

Wyoming has few statewide anti-smoking laws. There are no bans on smoking in schools, private workplaces, child-care facilities, restaurants, or bars. Local governments are permitted to pass stronger anti-smoking regulations, though, and more than 25 communities have smoke-free laws, according to Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights. The tax on cigarettes is 60 cents per pack.

6. Oklahoma

Smoking is banned on state government property, in indoor workplaces, at schools and child care facilities, and at zoos in Oklahoma. But various exceptions mean smoking is still permitted in many areas, including bars, restaurants with designated smoking sections, and private offices. Cities are specifically banned from passing more restrictive anti-smoking laws. The cigarette tax is \$1.03 per pack.