

## National Cancer Society Malaysia supports smoking ban



Further to the move by Malaysia's Health Ministry to ban the sale of cigarettes at rest and relaxation stops on Malaysian highways, the Ministry is now proposing to extend the ban to public areas and all eateries nationwide, as well as in open-air premises.

The National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM) fully endorses and supports this long awaited proposed move by the Ministry that will restrict the number of places where smoking is allowed.

"NCSM firmly supports and favours the proposed implementation of the ban on smoking at all eateries nationwide, including in open-air premises such as parks," said Dr Saunthari Somasundaram, president and medical director of NCSM.

Research shows that 38.0% of men and 1.4% of women in Malaysia are smokers. These numbers are very alarming as an estimated 100,000 Malaysians die every year from smoke-related illnesses, according to statistics published by the Ministry.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey carried out in Malaysia in 2011 showed that 83.5% of the respondents want 100% smoke-free public places.

During the 21st century, an estimated one billion people worldwide will die due to tobacco use.

It is laudable for Malaysia to follow the example of other first-world nations as well as developing countries, which have enforced the smoking ban in public places since 2004.

Various forms of regulations and smoking bans in public places have been implemented in numerous countries around the world, from Albania to Zambia.

To protect public health, NCSM feels very strongly that tobacco products should be regulated by the authorities. Tobacco products should be regulated at the manufacturing, marketing and distribution stages.

NCSM also strongly advocates a smoking ban in all public places.

While some may argue that such a ban may impinge on the rights of smokers as smoking is a personal choice, we know that smoking in public places affects all the people around those who smoke, not just the smokers.

A ban on smoking in public areas will promote a healthier lifestyle for everyone.

Malaysia does not have a comprehensive national legislation that protects people from Secondhand Smoke (SHS), although subnational jurisdictions have the authority to implement laws that ban smoking in public places.

According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) Malaysia 2011, among those who worked indoors, four in 10 were exposed to SHS in the workplace while almost four in 10 adults were exposed to tobacco smoke at home.

The survey also showed that more than eight in 10 adults were exposed to SHS when visiting cafes, coffee shops and bistros, while almost eight in 10 adults were exposed when visiting bars and nightclubs.

The survey also showed that seven in 10 adults were exposed to SHS when visiting restaurants, which equates to 42% of the entire adult population of Malaysia.

Twenty percent of adults were exposed to SHS when visiting government buildings and 28% of adults were exposed to SHS when using public transportation.

Almost 9% of adults were exposed to SHS when visiting healthcare facilities.

A 30-day GATS study showed that in Malaysia, 39.8% of adults had been exposed to SHS in the workplace while among non-smokers only, 33.9% had been exposed.

Men (46.2% overall, 39.1% of non-smokers) were more likely than women (30.1% overall, 29.8% of non-smokers) to be exposed to SHS in the workplace.

The prevalence of SHS exposure in the workplace for residents of urban areas (41.6% overall, 35.6% of non-smokers) was higher than those residing in rural areas (33.1% overall, 27.4% of non-smokers).

Dr Saunthari said that NCSM has also set up an online petition asking for members of the public to sign the petition, encouraging all Malaysians to exercise their rights to live in a smoke-free environment and nation.

The introduction of the "SMOKING! YES I MIND!!" online petition campaign by NCSM is to encourage Malaysians to support a move to ban smoking in all public places in the country, including in open-air public spaces such as parks.

To sign-up and support this smoking ban, Malaysians can access this petition via NCSM's website <http://www.cancer.org.my/> and Facebook page of National Cancer Society Malaysia.

"We're hoping to receive at least 10,000 support signatures from individuals and organisations by June 30, 2015, to urge authorities to implement this smoking ban nationwide," Dr Saunthari added.

For those who prefer a more conventional way of supporting this campaign, a copy of the petition can be downloaded from the above online sites and mailed to NCSM. These hardcopy petitions will then be collected and sent to the Health Ministry.

Of particular concern to NCSM is secondhand smoke and its harmful impact on children. While everyone can be exposed to secondhand smoke in public places such as restaurants, shopping centres, public transportation and parks, schools, daycare centres and public places where children go are a special area of concern.

Today, an increasing number of people who are concerned about their family's health are choosing to patronise only restaurants and other businesses that are smoke-free.

The World Health Organization (WHO) considers smoking bans to have an influence in reducing demand for tobacco by creating an environment where smoking becomes increasingly more difficult, and helping shift social norms away from the acceptance of smoking in everyday life.