

IPH welcomes new tobacco regulations in Northern Ireland



1 February 2022

The Institute of Public Health (IPH) welcomes the introduction of new laws in Northern Ireland this week that will help to reduce children's exposure to second-hand smoke and prevent children accessing e-cigarettes.

Under new Tobacco Regulations, which come into effect from today, 1 February, it is now illegal to smoke in a vehicle where a child is present in Northern Ireland, with penalties applying to both the smoker and the driver of the vehicle for breaching the new law.

The regulations also prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products or e-cigarettes to children and make it an offence to purchase, or attempt to purchase, such products on behalf of a child.

Research carried out by the Department of Health, as part of a [mid-term review of its tobacco control strategy](#), found that one in 10 car owners in Northern Ireland permitted smoking in their car when children were present in 2018/19.

A 2013 joint [report](#) produced by IPH and the Tobacco-Free Research Institute found that children living in social disadvantage were more likely to be at risk of exposure to second-hand smoke and raised particular concerns for children with asthma.

Northern Ireland Health Minister Robin Swann described the roll out of the new tobacco regulations as a landmark day: "I am delighted to see that this legislation has now become a reality. Its introduction represents a landmark for myself as Minister, the department, and for all those who have campaigned so hard for its introduction.

“It will reduce the risk of smoking to our loved ones, particularly children, protecting them from the harm caused by inhaling second-hand smoke and of equal importance, it also sends out a clear message of our determination to tackle the dangers of smoking which kills thousands of people each year in Northern Ireland. I hope it can also provide a spur to smokers to give up smoking once and for all.”

Welcoming the new regulations, IPH Director of Policy Helen McAvoy said: “These are important developments which deliver on commitments made in the 2012 Northern Ireland Tobacco Control Strategy to protect people from tobacco smoke. We know that second-hand smoke is highly toxic and can accumulate inside cars even when windows are open – this law seeks to protect children from these harmful exposures.”

“The introduction of these new regulations in Northern Ireland now also means there is a consistent approach across the island of Ireland to reduce second-hand smoke exposure in private vehicles when children are present,” Dr McAvoy added.



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Director of Policy

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Institute of
Public Health



In March 2017, the Institute [responded](#) to the Northern Ireland Department of Health consultation on proposals to regulate smoking in private vehicles.

At that time, IPH highlighted:

- The need for greater restrictions to reduce the frequency and intensity of second-hand smoke exposure
- The value of these measures in de-normalising and reducing smoking uptake as well as reducing second-hand smoke exposure.
- The benefits of a consistent form of regulation across the UK and Ireland.

IPH recently conducted a mid-term review of Northern Ireland’s Tobacco Control Strategy, which included an [evidence review](#) and [stakeholder engagement process](#). An Easy Read summary of the findings and recommendations made in the stakeholder report is available [here](#) and of the Evidence Review can be found [here](#).

Banning smoking in cars where children are present was implemented in 2015 in England and Wales and then in Ireland and Scotland in 2016.

Evaluation of the smoking ban in cars has demonstrated that this legislation has been successful in reducing children's exposure to second-hand smoke.

Preschool children, those aged 5 years and younger, are at the greatest risk of exposure to second-hand smoke from parental smoking.

Evidence from Scotland has also shown a reduction in severe asthma episodes requiring hospital admission among this vulnerable population following the roll out of the vehicle smoking ban.

IPH is a member of the [Smoke-free Homes Innovation Network \(SHINE\)](#), a UK and Ireland group of researchers working on approaches to reduce second-hand smoke exposures.

Information on the new regulations can be found on the NI Direct website at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/smoking-and-vaping-regulations-northern-ireland>.

Advice on getting help to stop smoking is available at <https://www.stopsmokingni.info/>

For advice on protecting your family from second-hand smoke visit – <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/quit-smoking/reasons-to-quit-smoking/protect-your-family-from-secondhand-smoke.html>

[1] [Lavery AA, Hone T, Vamos EP, Anyanwu PE, Taylor-Robinson D, de Vocht F, Millett C, Hopkinson NS. Impact of banning smoking in cars with children on exposure to second-hand smoke: a natural experiment in England and Scotland. Thorax. 2020 Apr 1;75\(4\):345-7.](#)

[2] [Mackay DF, Turner SW, Semple SE, Dick S, Pell JP. Associations between smoke-free vehicle legislation and childhood admissions to hospital for asthma in Scotland: an interrupted time-series analysis of whole-population data. The Lancet Public Health. 2021 Aug 1;6\(8\):e579-86.](#)

[3] [Mackay DF, Turner SW, Semple SE, Dick S, Pell JP. Associations between smoke-free vehicle legislation and childhood admissions to hospital for asthma in Scotland: an interrupted time-series analysis of whole-population data. The Lancet Public Health. 2021 Aug 1;6\(8\):e579-86.](#)