



Sir Keir Starmer vows to ‘take decisions’ on outdoor smoking ban to ease NHS ‘burden’ Free 221224

## Description

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NHS 'heartened' by possible beer garden smoking ban while pubs say it will 'increase isolation'

Sir Keir Starmer has said the Government will "take decisions" on a potential outdoor smoking ban in an effort to curb preventable deaths and alleviate pressure on the NHS.

According to leaked proposals seen by The Sun newspaper, the Government is set to bring in a ban on smoking in some outdoor areas to improve public health.

Hospitality bosses have warned that proposed plans that could see the banning of smoking in beer gardens and outside stadiums, would be another "nail in the coffin" for pubs and bars.

Chris Jowsey, chief executive of Admiral Taverns, which runs more than 1,600 pubs in the UK, told the PA news agency: "This proposed ban is going to drive people who smoke away from the pub. It increases isolation.

"I'm no fan of smoking, but I just can't see how this will improve health outcomes if you move people from smoking in a pub garden to smoking at home.

"It doesn't really make any sense to me. It feels really ill-thought through. It would also reduce footfall and revenue into pubs."

But Dr Layla McCay, of the NHS Confederation, said she is "heartened" to see the Government try and address "one of Britain's main drivers of health inequalities".

The ban could also cover other locations including small parks, outdoor restaurants and hospitals.

Sir Keir told reporters in Paris: "My starting point on this is to remind everyone that over 80,000 people lose their lives every year because of smoking. That's a preventable death.

"It's a huge burden on the NHS, and, of course, it's a burden on the taxpayer. So, yes, we are going to take decisions in this space.

"More details will be revealed, but this is a preventable series of deaths, and we've got to take the action to reduce the burden on the NHS and reduce the burden on the taxpayer."

He added: "I think it's important to get the balance right, but everybody watching this who uses the NHS will know that it's on its knees.

"We have to relieve the burden, and that's why I spoke before the election about moving to a preventative model when it comes to health."

Reem Ibrahim, acting director of communications at the Institute of Economic Affairs thinktank, said banning outdoor smoking would be "another nail in the coffin for the pub industry".

She said: "The Government's own impact assessment concluded that banning smoking outdoors will lead to pub closures and job losses.

"Pubs and other private venues should be able to determine their own outdoor smoking rules – just as

they should be allowed to decide whether to play music, serve food or show football on TV.”

She added: “The Government should look to countries like Sweden, which has attained the lowest prevalence of smoking in the world not by implementing nanny state measures like this proposal, but by allowing adults to choose safer and healthier products.”

Tim Martin, founder of JD Wetherspoon, told the PA news agency the proposed smoking ban raises a “libertarian issue”.

He said: “The question is whether the Government should interfere in individual liberties where danger is involved.

“Mountaineering is dangerous, for example. Horse riding, statistically, causes many serious injuries. I don’t think it will have a big effect on our business, one way or the other, and is really a libertarian issue.”

But Dr Layla McCay, of the NHS Confederation, said she is “heartened” to see that progress is being made on abolishing smoking.

She told BBC Radio 4’s Today Programme: “It’s the leading cause of preventable illness in the UK. So, we are heartened to see that progress is being made and that the intention is moving forward to really address one of Britain’s main drivers of health inequalities.”

She added: “Ultimately, all of these steps are steps in the same journey, which is towards a smoke-free future for Britain, reducing those health inequalities, reducing the huge problems that are caused to the individual and to society from smoking.

“So, it’s not surprising but in this journey there will be different types of decisions, and there will be hard decisions that need to be made.

“I think that, as a society, we do recognise that this is the right direction of travel, that has been very clear for many years.”

In 2007, under the last Labour government, smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces was made illegal across the UK.

According to health charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), in the year following the introduction of smoke-free laws, there was a 2.4% reduction in hospital admissions for heart attacks in England, saving the NHS £8.4 million in the first year alone.

The first year after the introduction of the indoor smoking ban also saw a 12.3% reduction in hospital admissions for childhood asthma, equivalent to 6,803 fewer admissions over three years.

Former prime minister Rishi Sunak announced plans to crack down on smoking through his flagship Tobacco and Vapes Bill last year.

The Bill – dubbed the “greatest piece of public health legislation in a generation” – had earned wide cross-party support and was progressing through Parliament when the general election was called.

Charities and health experts were dismayed when the Bill was shelved as a result.

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of ASH, said: “The priority is to get the Bill back in Parliament and put on the statute book, to end smoking for the next generation and curb youth vaping.

“ASH would support the inclusion of powers to extend smoke-free laws outdoors, subject to consultation.”

She added: “However, it’s also important to ensure that there are still outdoor areas where people who smoke can smoke in the open air, rather than inside their homes.”

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