

News release



New smoking law ‘could save thousands of lives’

Dr Stephen Singleton, regional director of public health for the North East, warmly welcomed the new smokefree legislation.

He said: “This is the most important public health measure to be introduced in England in living memory.

“One in two smokers dies early as a result of the habit. Non-smokers also die and have their health damaged by secondhand smoke.

“In our region the figures make stark reading. About 5,700 people die every year from smoking-related diseases. Approximately 200 people die from secondhand smoke, about 35 of them as a result of exposure in the workplace.

“Not only will the new laws protect workers and customers, they will also help smokers who want to give up kick the habit.

“It will save hundreds – and if smokers use this change as an incentive to quit, thousands - of lives in our region, which is blighted by high levels of premature and preventable deaths.

“For generations the North East has suffered from the worst health in the country, partly as a result of our history of heavy industry.

“We also have higher than average rates of smoking, alcohol consumption and childhood obesity.

“But there are signs of improvement, especially in relation to heart disease. Since 1993 death rates from circulatory diseases have fallen substantially - by more than 50 per cent in some areas. And death rates from cancer have been reduced by up to one third.

“More work needs to be done, however, particularly on tackling the inequalities which result in the less well-off having the poorest health and lowest life expectancy.

“Introducing restrictions on smoking in public places is just one step in a long journey. But it will give us a solid foundation on which to build a healthier society in the North East.

“I suspect that in a very short time we will view smoking in pubs and restaurants the way we regard smoking in cinemas and on aeroplanes now – as totally unacceptable.”

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