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## Vaping ban in smokefree areas may cause more harm than good

A plan by the New South Wales government to ban vaping in smoke-free and indoor areas may actually have a harmful effect on public health, according to the non-for-profit Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA).

The proposed ban is intended to protect bystanders from passive exposure to vapour, however a report by the UK government-backed body [Public Health England](#) last week has found there are “no identified health risks of passive vaping”.

ATHRA Chairman, Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn from the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales says while the proposed ban may be well-intentioned, it is not founded in scientific fact and may have negative consequences’.

“Tobacco smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals and toxins. However, most of these are absent from vapour or, if present, are mostly at levels less than one per cent of the concentrations in smoke” Dr Mendelsohn said.

“Furthermore, vapour is only expelled by the vaper *after* most of the chemicals have already been absorbed, and it dissipates at a much faster speed than cigarette smoke.”

Dr Mendelsohn said second-hand vapour is not entirely risk-free and more research is needed. “However, if there is a negative effect, it is likely to be very small indeed,” he said.

“The proposed blanket ban sends a message that vaping is harmful like smoking and may discourage smokers from switching to vaping” Dr Mendelsohn said. “In fact, we should be encouraging smokers to switch. According to [Public Health England](#), switching completely from smoking to vaping conveys substantial health benefits over continued smoking.”

According to ATHRA Board member Dr Alex Wodak, “A more nuanced approach should be considered such as the model being used in [England](#). Under their guidelines, the decision to allow vaping or not is left to local authorities or business owners. Some bystanders may find the aerosol annoying, like strong perfume or body odour, and organisations may choose to restrict vaping to certain rooms or times”.

In the UK, [Public Health England](#) estimated that 20,000-57,000 additional smokers quit using vaporisers (e-cigarette) each year in England and vaping is promoted in publicly funded television advertisements.

In spite of this, Australia is one of the few OECD countries to effectively ban vaping with nicotine. This is despite the fact that an estimated [500,000](#) premature Australian deaths from smoking could be averted if two in three smokers switched to vaping over the next 10 years.

“Public health policy should be guided by the best available evidence. A blanket ban on vaping in smoke-free areas is lazy policy and is likely to have unintended harmful consequences,” he said.

## ENDS

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## What is ATHRA?

The Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA) is a not-for-profit health promotion organisation (awaiting charity status) established to improve public health by reducing the harm from tobacco smoking in Australia. ATHRA is managed by the Board of Directors, which consists of four independent medical practitioners and one consumer representative with an interest in public health. None of the directors have any financial or commercial relationship with any electronic cigarette or tobacco company.

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