



Most smokers support smokefree council-owned playgrounds: national survey data

Background—From an international perspective, New Zealand has been one of the world leaders in passing smokefree environment laws to protect the health of non-smokers and advance tobacco control.¹ It passed a major law in 1990 and the updated 2003 legislation (implemented during 2004) extended smokefree areas to all restaurants, bars and additional indoor workplaces that were not covered by the 1990 law.

There has also been progress in terms of outdoor smokefree areas. Smoking in outdoor settings is prohibited in the grounds of all schools by the 2003 legislation.

“Educative” smokefree parks policies have been currently adopted by 29% (21/73) of the city and district councils in New Zealand. These are policies which rely on signposts, media coverage and public pressure to limit smoking, rather than on legal enforcement. The grounds of some hospitals, some stadiums, and the campuses of at least one university (Massey) are also covered by smokefree policies.

A 2007 survey in Upper Hutt found that 83% of adult park users thought that having a “smokefree parks policy” was a good idea.² There was even majority support (73%) by smokers for the Upper Hutt smokefree park policy. A 2007 national survey gave options of agreeing that smoking in various settings was acceptable anywhere, in set areas, or not at all. Over a third (38%) said that it was not at all acceptable in local parks or reserves, and 76% said it was not at all acceptable in outdoor children’s playgrounds.³ Nevertheless, there has been no national survey data on what *smokers* think about smokefree parks – an issue we address in the results below.

New NZ data on smokers’ attitudes—Between March 2007 and February 2008 we surveyed a national sample of 1376 New Zealand adult (18+ years) smokers. One question asked: “Do you think smoking should be allowed at council-owned playgrounds?” Further detail on the survey methods is available elsewhere.⁴

Results weighted to reflect the national population of smokers showed that 65.7% disagreed (95% confidence interval = 62.3% to 69.1%) and only 31.9% agreed with this question. That is, there appears to be substantial majority support by smokers themselves for not allowing smoking in council-owned playgrounds.

New Zealand advocates and local government policymakers now have additional evidence of public support to continue to further progress smokefree parks. This evidence for support can be combined with the evidence that children tend to copy what they observe, and are influenced by the normality and extent of smoking around them.⁵⁻⁷ Outdoor smokefree policies may also reduce secondhand smoke-related health impacts,⁸ and also reduce rate-payer and tax-payer costs associated with smoking-related fires and litter. Overall we suggest there are strong arguments for these type of smokefree outdoor places.⁹

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Competing interests: Three of the authors (GT, NW, RE) have undertaken work for health sector agencies working in tobacco control.

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