

Paramus health board bans smoking in public places

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[Paramus](#) is once again at the forefront of tobacco control, as the Board of Health unanimously adopted an ordinance that prohibits smoking in borough parks, playgrounds, public swimming facilities and recreational areas.

The ordinance, approved last month, covers lighted cigarettes, cigars, pipes and electronic cigarettes within the boundaries of "smoke-free zones," borough public areas that include the Municipal Pool, the Band Shell and the [Paramus](#) Golf Club Mini Golf Course, according to Health Officer John Hopper. Several parks that are not used for recreation, such as Fireman's Park on Forest Avenue which just consists of a monument, are not covered under the ordinance.

The areas included will have signs advising visitors about their status. Penalties range from a fine of \$50 to \$100 for the first violation, \$100 to \$200 for the second violation, and \$200 to \$500 for the third and subsequent violations, according to Hopper.

"We're very pleased that the [Paramus](#) Board of Health is very interested in preserving public health in Paramus for its residents and visitors to parks, especially since the parks are places where people congregate to engage in physical activity," said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (NJGASP).

New Jersey is behind only California for the number of municipalities with smoking ordinances, with 150 communities restricting smoking in outside public areas to some degree, according to Blumenfeld. The limitations range from covering only the areas outside municipal buildings to the ordinances adopted by the 100 communities that contain restrictions or bans in all public parks.

"It's not a new phenomenon in New Jersey, but it's gaining momentum," she said. "New York City's new law served as an impetus for other communities to follow, and many New Jersey shore towns have passed restrictions."

In addition to New York City banning smoking in all its public parks, Long Branch recently banned smoking on all public beaches, and Seaside Park banned smoking on all beaches, boardwalks and recreational areas, according to Blumenfeld.

Secondhand smoke can still be a problem for people outside of enclosed areas, Hopper said. Approximately half the childhood cases of asthma, chronic bronchitis and wheezing can be attributed to secondhand smoke, and it also causes cardiovascular disease in people of all ages.

"It is less concentrated because it is outside, but there is a certain amount of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke even if it is outdoors," Hopper said.

The regulation also helps people who have conditions that are easily exacerbated by even small amounts of smoke, Blumenfeld said. Particularly among senior citizens, any amount of smoke can cause discomfort regardless of the concentration.

In addition, the change can simultaneously reduce the number of people who take up smoking and help smokers who



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The Paramus Board of Health banned smoking in borough parks, playgrounds, public swimming facilities and recreational areas.

wish to quit succeed, according to Blumenfeld. Approximately 70 percent of smokers wish to quit the habit, and having smoke-free parks gives them another place they can go without being reminded of the habit.

Children, who often emulate what they see in adults, frequent the playgrounds where smoking is now banned and will see non-smoking "normalized," according to Blumenfeld. Because 90 percent of smokers begin the habit before age 18, preventing children from becoming smokers is important in controlling tobacco usage, she said.

"There is a factor that children tend to emulate adult behavior, and when children observe adults doing certain things, whether it be positive or negative behavior, they want to emulate it," Hopper said. "So, if we prevent adults from smoking in front of children, perhaps they won't tend to take up smoking."

The ordinance will also help the environment, Blumenfeld said. Banning smoking in parks will reduce the waste created by discarded cigarettes and cigarette packs, simultaneously keeping the borough's parks cleaner while reducing the amount of work required for their maintenance.

This is not the first time [Paramus](#) has been at the forefront of legislation involved tobacco use. In the past, the borough has passed ordinances restricting the placement of cigarette vending machines, vigorously pursued the enforcement of preventing underage tobacco purchases and was at the forefront of the state's ban on electronic cigarettes in work and public environments.

"It serves as a model for other communities, which I think is key," Blumenfeld said. "For other communities in [Bergen County](#) that have not yet looked at a smoke-free parks policy, [Paramus](#) is a good model for them to follow."

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