

Independent HSE: Don't Smoke in Your Home if Our Staff Are There

Eilish O'Regan , 1/13/15

Health Service Executive (HSE) staff have been told that as a "last resort" the service may be withdrawn if the client or patient resists the ban.

Under the new HSE policy rules, the client is also instructed not to smoke for at least an hour before the visit. The same restriction applies to others in the house, who also cannot smoke while the health worker is present.

Under the 2004 smoking ban, smokers' homes were exempt but the new policy from the HSE points out that domestic settings are effectively the workplaces for health staff and they deserve to be protected from the effects of second-hand smoke.

The HSE has now decided that it has a duty of care to provide a safe working environment for workers, including agency staff.

The document said clients should be "made aware that the visiting staff member may leave if they do not comply with this policy."

It said that usually people will turn off the television or remove animals from a room.

It wants the area for the visit to be properly ventilated if smoking has taken place, with windows and doors opened.

"They should be made aware an alternative venue may be necessary for the visit if they do not co-operate or that in exceptional circumstances the service may be withdrawn." The alternative venue could be a HSE clinic.

Emergency

When the visit is unscheduled or an emergency then a "verbal request should be made for a smoke-free room."

It acknowledges that it may be only possible in that situation to reduce rather than eliminate the risk and "each situation must be addressed on a case-by-case basis." It also points out there may be some "complex, crisis or emergency setting" where the staff entering a domestic setting decide to continue with the visit even though the client is smoking.

They may be "acutely distressed or a terminally ill." The worker is advised to complete an incident report form in such circumstances.

It said that "at all times employees need to assess whether an environment is safe to provide a service and inform their line manager."

The HSE is using posters and leaflets in clinics, hospitals and surgeries to notify people of the no smoking in the home rules.

Asked to comment on the measure, Eamon Timmins of Age Action Ireland said: "Age Action understands and accepts that the HSE is complying with legislation to protect the health of their staff.

"However, in some cases it may be providing essential home help services to vulnerable people who are also smokers.

"It is important that this policy is applied sensitively, working with older people who are smokers so that their smoking does not harm their home helps.

"By explaining the need for the policy and working with the older person to find a solution, we hope that the needs of both the older person and the home help can be met," he added.

Clients who fail to agree are to be sent a letter by a HSE manager asking for their co-operation and pointing out people are entitled under Irish law to work in a smoke-free environment.

The letter also includes information on supports available to those who want to quit the habit.

Irish Independent

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/health/hse-dont-smoke-in-your-home-if-our-staff-are-there-30902558.html>