

## **Open letter re gazetting alfresco restaurants as no-smoking zones**

The following letter is signed by 30 Malaysian medical organisations. We represent the majority of the medical fraternity in Malaysia.

We are writing to express our support for the Ministry of Health's recent announcement by the Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye that the Ministry intends to gazette alfresco restaurants as no-smoking zones under the Control of Tobacco Products (Amendment) Regulations 2017.

Dr Lee was quoted as saying "The gazettelement of the new smoke-free zones under the Control of Tobacco Product Act is to protect the public, especially non-smokers, from the dangers of secondhand smoke".

We could not agree more with this statement.

One in two smokers will die from the use of tobacco. While that is a tragedy on its own, it is an even greater travesty that many non-smokers suffer numerous ailments as a result of secondhand smoke.

Secondhand smoke contains more than 7000 chemicals, of which many cause cancer. Studies have shown that it causes premature heart disease and lung cancer amongst non-smokers and even leads to strokes.

The effects are particularly felt by women and children, who are often at the mercy of smokers and are unable to voice out their concerns. For example, secondhand smoke leads to more frequent and severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections and ear infections. It also increases the risk of premature birth, low birth weight, birth defects and sudden infant death syndrome.

It is also essential to note that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.

With these factors in mind, many governments across the world have taken measures to protect their citizens from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. For example, a policy making it illegal to smoke in work places in England came into force on 1 July 2007 as a consequence of the Health Act 2006.

An analysis of studies found that admissions for heart attacks fell by 42 per cent among men and 43 per cent among women in the five years since the ban was introduced in 2007. Rates of hospitalisations for asthma were also reduced. In the United States, a review found a 14 per cent reduction in strokes in counties which introduced a ban, compared with those which did not.

These numbers translate to real lives that are saved from the physical, financial and emotional burdens of disease. Although some will undoubtedly voice concerns regarding the negative economic impact on local restaurants, it is worth noting that even here the evidence suggest otherwise - in England, many eateries have thrived since the smoking ban as they changed their focus on more high-quality food and trying to attract families - including those with young children - who would previously have avoided smoky atmospheres.

Furthermore, the government will be fulfilling their obligation to protect public health & make public places 100% smoke-free, as detailed in the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which Malaysia signed and ratified.

We acknowledge and congratulate the new government's emphasis on preventive medicine and addressing the scourge of non-communicable diseases at their infancy. We look forward to both Dr Lee and our Health Minister, Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, leading the way in ensuring that the gazettelement is made official.

There is no greater modifiable risk factor than tobacco, and by implementing measures to reduce the impact of secondhand smoking, the government will go a long way in reducing the nation's healthcare costs whilst increasing the well-being of the rakyat.

Signed,

Academy of Medicine of Malaysia  
Academy of Medicine of Malaysia - College of Surgeons  
Academy of Medicine of Malaysia - College of Physicians  
Addiction Medicine Association of Malaysia  
Asthma Malaysia  
Family Medicine Specialists Association of Malaysia  
Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia  
Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia  
Lung Foundation of Malaysia  
Malaysian Association for Bronchology and Interventional Pulmonology  
Malaysian Association of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery  
Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control  
Malaysian Medical Association  
Malaysian Medics International  
Malaysian Oncological Society  
Malaysian Paediatric Association  
Malaysian Psychiatric Association  
Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine  
Malaysian Thoracic Society  
Medical Mythbusters Malaysia  
Medical Practitioners Coalition Association Of Malaysia  
Medical Tweet Malaysia  
National Cancer Society of Malaysia  
National Heart Association of Malaysia  
Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Malaysia  
Perinatal Society of Malaysia  
Persatuan Kesihatan IKRAM Malaysia  
Persatuan Pakar Perubatan Kesihatan Awam Malaysia  
Pertubuhan Doktor-doktor Islam Malaysia  
Vascular Society of Malaysia