

Freedom to Breathe

Secondhand smoke is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. According to the Surgeon General, there is no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure.

In the past, smoking was allowed in restaurants, bars, hospitals, businesses and even schools. In 1975, Minnesota became the first state to pass a law limiting smoking in workplaces. Over the years, parts of this law were changed and strengthened to prohibit smoking in specific public places, such as schools, daycare centers, hospitals and clinics, state government buildings, public transport, and other public indoor areas. Places like bars and restaurants were left out of the regulations.

In 2007, after a long and heated legislative debate and vigorous activism by public health advocates across the state, Minnesota passed the Freedom to Breathe Act.

Highlights of the Freedom to Breathe Act

- No smoking is allowed in bars, restaurants, private clubs or other workplaces.
- Exclusions to the policy include use in scientific studies; theatrical productions by actors; traditional Native American ceremonies; hotel and motel guestrooms; product sampling in tobacco shops; a disabled veterans rest camp in Washington County; locked psychiatric units; and on family farms. ¹

In 2014, the State of Minnesota began extending Freedom to Breathe laws, prohibiting the use of electronic cigarettes in government owned buildings, schools and hospitals. However, as of 2016, there is no state law regulating the use of electronic cigarettes in all indoor public spaces, such as bars and restaurants. Many cities and counties throughout the state have regulated electronic cigarettes in local clean indoor air ordinances. This means they are regulated the same as conventional cigarettes for purposes of clean indoor air.