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[Mayor Bloomberg Signs Bill to Prohibit Smoking in NYC Parks, Beaches, and Pedestrian Plazas](#)
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New York City passed its first Smoke Free Air Act in 1988. Since then, it has been amended three times, most notably in 2002, when smoking in indoor areas – including restaurants and bars – was banned. In addition to banning smoking at restaurants, bars, movie theatres, playgrounds, and outside of hospital entrances, the City has also taken aggressive steps to increase the taxes on cigarettes and prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products. The Department of Health has also launched annual smoking cessation programs, which distribute free nicotine patches to those who are interested in kicking their habit.

Because of our combined efforts over the last nine years, there are 350,000 fewer people who smoke and New Yorkers are living nineteen months longer than they did in 2002. But there is still work to be done. There are still 950,000 adult smokers in New York City and 18,000 teenage smokers and a vast majority of us are exposed to the harmful effects of second-hand smoke on a daily basis.

Creating smoke-free parks and beaches makes sense for many reasons. First and foremost, it will reduce the number of people exposed to second-hand smoke. There are many harmful effects of second-hand smoke. Second-hand smoke can increase upper respiratory infections, cause ear infections, and worsen asthma. Exposure to second-hand smoke also has adverse effects on the cardiovascular system. And children around adults who smoke are exposed to these toxins in greater numbers and may learn to pick up the habit when they are older. If we can protect our children from the dangers of smoking, we can raise an entire generation of New Yorkers who are free from the dangers of nicotine addiction.

Smoking in parks and beaches not only harms people trying to enjoy these recreational facilities, it also causes a litter problem that harms the beauty of our parks. Cigarette litter is difficult and expensive to clean up and is a hazard to children, pets, and the environment. Cigarette-related litter accounts for 75 percent of all litter on beaches and 33 percent of all litter in parks.

Frederic Law Olmstead hailed public parks as the 'lungs of the City' – a haven where one could escape the overcrowded, noisy, and polluted streets. We need to ensure that our public spaces provide just that – a healthy place in which to relax and enjoy the surroundings. Smoke-free parks and beaches will make these recreational spaces more enjoyable for everyone by providing open space, clean air, and healthy activities.

I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Farley, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Adrian Benepe, Commissioner of the Parks Department, and their staff along with Andrea Fastenberg, Senior Counsel at the Law Department and my Office of City Legislative Affairs for their work on this bill. I would also like to thank Speaker Quinn and the City Council who have always been our partners in improving our quality-of-life and making New York City a healthier place to live.