France to Ban Smoking in Public

Paris/France, 08.10.2006 (BBC)

France is to ban smoking in all public places from next February, the prime minister has announced.

Cafes, nightclubs and restaurants are to be given until January 2008 to adapt, said Dominique de Villepin.

Those found in breach of the ban would be fined - 75 euros (£50) for individuals and 150 euros for the premises where the offence occurred.

Smoking kills more than 13 people a day in France, said Mr de Villepin - calling it an "unacceptable reality".

Mr de Villepin made the announcement in a television interview.

"We started on the basis of a simple observation - two figures: 60,000 deaths a year in our country linked directly to tobacco consumption and 5,000 deaths linked to passive smoking.

"That makes more than 13 deaths a day. It is an unacceptable reality in our country in terms of public health," he said.

Treatment

Public places include stations, museums, government offices and shops, but not streets or private places such as houses or hotel rooms.

Mr de Villepin added the state would take charge of one-third of the costs of anti-smoking treatments, such as a patch.

"That would represent the first month of treatment," he said.

Several countries have already taken similar measures.

Opinion polls in France - often considered a nation of smokers - suggest 70% of the people support the ban, says the BBC's Valerie Jones in Paris.

The European Union's most enthusiastic smokers are in Greece, Cyprus and Portugal, according to findings published in May this year.

Source: BBC NEWS, London