

# Law banning smoking in cars faces obstacles in UAE

Proposal meant to shield child passengers from second-hand smoke

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Dubai: While the UAE has taken major steps to protect people from second-hand smoke, stricter measures to protect children are taking longer because of "obstacles", a senior health official said.

Dr Wedad Al Maidour, head of the national tobacco control committee, said the law prohibiting smoking in a car if a child is aboard is taking time to enforce.

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The health ministry official was responding to a study in the British medical journal Lancet that warned 600,000 people, including children, die every year due to passive smoking or second-hand smoke.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said a third of those deaths are of children who are subjected to second-hand smoke at home. Infants who are exposed to passive smoke are at high risk of sudden death syndrome, pneumonia and asthma, it said.

The author of the study had said: "There can be no question that the 1.2 billion smokers in the world are exposing billions of non-smokers to second-hand smoke, a disease-causing indoor air pollutant."

While the car is considered as a personal property, UAE legislators are trying to push through the ban with the argument that it is an "enclosed place".

UAE has taken steps to ensure that enclosed places such as shopping malls, work places, public transport, places of worship and educational institutions are free from smoke, said the doctor. "Smoking [of shishas] is banned even in open areas, parks and gardens," she said.

## **Huge pressure**

Asked if there is huge pressure from the tobacco industry, Dr Wedad said, "We are fighting against strong obstacles."

She said the Federal law against smoking took more than six years to come into force. She said she foresees similar time in bringing the bylaws into force.

The Federal law against smoking was issued in January this year.

But the ministry official insisted that the decision-makers, the leadership of the country, "do not wish to lose more and more people at a young age".

The government is spending large sums to treat people and is making huge efforts to tackle non-infectious diseases such as diabetes, she said.

Dr Al Madoor said there is no fight with the tobacco industry, "but we have a right to protect our people's health," she said.

One of the bylaws is to make smoking very expensive and double the cost of a cigarette packet. Presently, it costs about Dh 7 or less for a pack, which is quite cheap compared to the price in developed countries.

The proposed increase to hit the wallets of smokers is part of the bylaws of Federal Law to control smoking.

### **Health hazard**

- Children whose parents smoke are more prone to asthma symptoms and attacks before they are five.
- Some countries have banned smoking in cars if there is a child inside under 16 years of age. The fines are huge.
- UAE is also pressing for a ban in private cars, similar to the ban in enclosed places