

Patios and playgrounds open for the season ? smoke free

The May long weekend is the start of patio season in our region and this year restaurant and bar patios will be more refreshing than ever thanks to changes in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act that ban smoking on all patios where food or drink is served or consumed. ?We have been working hard to get the required signage and information out to all establishments in our area,? said Martin Kuhn, of the Health Unit.

?The onus is now on the owners to ensure they remove all ash trays, post signs, educate their staff and stop patrons from lighting up in No Smoking areas.?

He says the health unit's tobacco enforcement officers don't want to have to charge either business owners or patrons for breaking the law, they would much rather ?catch people doing the right thing.?

Customers should feel comfortable speaking to staff if someone smokes around them.

?If you aren't satisfied with the outcome, you can call and leave a message with our Health Connection phone line and we will follow up with a visit to the business to ensure compliance.?

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act now also bans smoking within 20 metres of children's playgrounds, play areas, and publicly owned sports fields.

At playgrounds and play areas signage should be posted and the public is encouraged to remind people of the new law if anyone is smoking around their children.

?Obviously it's harder to police playgrounds and sports fields but we expect that once people become aware of the new law they will do the right thing to protect and promote the health of children in the community,? Kuhn said, that municipal staff will also be on alert to ensure the sports fields and playgrounds they manage are No Smoking.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act came into effect in 2006 to protect people from involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke. The January 2015 amendments extend that protection to outdoor restaurant workers and children and families at play.

In Canada tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death killing 37,000 people annually. Secondhand smoke is responsible for the death of 800 nonsmokers each year. Only one in five adults in the county still smoke, mirroring the provincial rate where 80 per cent of adults are smoke free.