

Smoking ban for all hospital grounds in Northern Ireland

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Smoking in the grounds of any Northern Ireland hospital is to be banned from next month.

Health bosses hope the move will pave the way for a cultural change and help prevent thousands of premature deaths.



Smoking anywhere in the grounds of any Northern Ireland hospital is to be banned from March

It means staff patients and visitors will no longer be allowed to smoke at the entrance of buildings, in car parks or even inside cars on trust premises.

Chief medical officer Dr Michael McBride said: "Smoking not only has a human cost. With one third of cancer deaths, and a significant proportion of coronary heart disease, strokes and circulatory illnesses, caused by smoking, it creates a massive financial burden on the health service in treating preventable smoking-related conditions.

"It is unacceptable for patients, visitors and staff to be subjected to second-hand smoking while on health and social care facilities. By making this move, we hope to both protect people's health directly and to influence cultural change by creating new norms around smoking in public.

"By creating smoke free environments, supported by stop smoking services, we hope we can take a big step forward in empowering people to quit their habit and live healthier lives."

Dr McBride was speaking as a smoking shelter outside the regional Cancer Centre in Belfast was demolished to make way for a bike dock - marking one month to go before the ban is introduced.

He warned that one in every two smokers would die from their habit.

"By going smoke free, the health service is taking a big step forward in tackling smoking head-on by making its premises healthier environments," added Dr McBride.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust, which runs Altnagelvin and Daisy Hill hospitals, introduced a smoke free policy last year.

It will be rolled out across the four other health authorities from March 9 to coincide with No Smoking Day.

Public Health Agency (PHA) chief executive Dr Eddie Rooney said: "Stopping smoking is the single biggest thing you can do to improve your health. Creating smoke free health and social care environments and providing tailored support for people who want to quit their habit will help in our ambition to protect public health.

"We hope that this move across the health service will act as a turning point for many people, including patients, visitors and staff, who will see it as an opportunity to quit their smoking habit."