

# Mumbai cancer specialists seek ban on smoking at all airports in India

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A team led by cancer specialists from Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH) has decided to write to the aviation watchdog seeking a complete ban on smoking at all the airports across India. Oncologists from TMH said the second and third-hand smoke from smoking lounges at the airports poses cardiac and cancer threats to millions of national and international fliers.

“A few hundred smokers are risking the lives of millions of passengers — as one can smell heavy stench of cigarette smoke while walking across these lounges. This smoke is laden with 4,000-odd lethal chemicals and deadly carcinogens, which children, pregnant women, senior citizen and other innocent commuters are forced to inhale,” said Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, professor and surgeon, TMH and secretary general, International Federation of Head and Neck Oncologic Societies.

An airport official said as a facility, they have to consider demands of all sections of the society, including those who smoke. “Smoking lounges at Mumbai international airports are small and located at a corner where non-smokers are not exposed to the smoke. Since smoking is also a psychological demand of a section of our commuters, we can’t completely ignore it because another section of society is demanding the opposite,” the official added.

Smoke free policies substantially improve indoor air quality and reduce second-hand smoke exposure among non smokers. CSIA caters to more than one lakh fliers daily. “We sensitive when it comes to norms related to public health. At CSIA, we ensure a smoke-free environment and have closed rooms to smoke.

The doctors plan to write to Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to implement indoor smoke-free policies at all the airports. In a recent correspondence with Mumbai International Airport Private Limited officials, Chaturvedi mentioned that the glass cabins of smoking lounges were cleverly designed to glamorise [smoking](#). “There is nothing illegal about the design, but it is shocking that your administration allowed them at a location with highest visibility that suited the cigarette industry rather than the passengers and airport staff,” Chaturvedi wrote.

Several international studies have documented that second-hand smoke can transfer from designated smoking areas into non-[smoking](#) areas, exposing non-smoking fliers and employees to various health hazards.

According to the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report (MMWR) of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading national public health institute of the US, Indira Gandhi International Airport (rank 21) and Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (rank 29), two of the 50 busiest busy airports in the world, don’t have indoor smoke-free policies.

“Separating smokers from non-smokers, cleaning the air and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposure of non-smokers to second-hand smoke,” said Brian King, deputy director for research translation, CDC. “People who spend time in, walk past, clean, or work near these rooms are at the risk of exposure to second-hand smoke.”

“In addition to subjecting non-smoking travellers who pass through these areas to involuntary secondhand smoke exposure, designated or ventilated smoking areas can also result in involuntary exposure of airport employees who are required to enter these areas or work near them,” researchers mentioned in the MMWR report.

**What is already known about this topic?**

There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Eliminating smoking in indoor spaces fully protects non-smokers from exposure to secondhand smoke. An overwhelming majority of large hub airports in the United States prohibit smoking indoors.

**What is added by this report?**

Among the 50 busiest airports worldwide, 23 airports (46%), including five of the 10 busiest airports, prohibit smoking in all indoor areas. While smoke-free airports among the 50 busiest are common in North America (14 of 18), few airports in Asia (4 of 22) have implemented smoke-free policies.

What are the implications for public health practice?

Broader implementation of smoke-free policies at the national, city, or airport authority levels can protect employees and travellers of all ages from secondhand smoke inside airports.