

# Smoke-free restaurants may be keeping Torontonians out of hospital: Study

By The Canadian Press

TORONTO - A ban on smoking in Toronto restaurants may be paying big health dividends, a new study suggests.

Rates of hospitalizations for heart attacks as well as heart and respiratory disease conditions plummeted after the city's ban on smoking in restaurants came into effect, according to the study, published Monday in the Canadian Medical Association Journal.

There was a 17.4 per cent drop in heart attack hospitalization rates and a 39 per cent decline in hospital admissions for cardiovascular conditions overall. The rate at which Torontonians were hospitalized for respiratory conditions - asthma or emphysema attacks, pneumonia and the like - decreased 33 per cent.

"This study's findings are consistent with the understanding that secondhand smoke has detrimental health impacts and legitimizes efforts to further reduce exposure," said Dr. Alisa Naiman, lead author of the study.

Naiman is a family physician and a researcher with Toronto's Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences; her co-authors are also researchers with ICES.

The study is an observational one, which means the researchers looked at what happened after a policy intervention occurred, in this case the smoking ban.

This kind of study cannot prove cause and effect; it can only spot changes that seem to be associated with the intervention. The authors used statistical modelling to try to rule out the possibility the effect seen might have been due to other factors.

The effect is large, and Naiman admitted in an interview that it's likely a number of other changes in society at the time contributed to it.

But other research points to big gains from this kind of move to limit the public's exposure to cigarette smoke, said Roberta Ferrence, a professor with the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

Toronto's smoking ban for restaurants came into effect in June of 2001 as part of a staged effort to make public locales and workplaces smoke free.

The study looked at rates of hospital admissions for a number of conditions from January 1996 to March 2006.

No decline in hospitalization rates was seen for some conditions that aren't thought to be influenced by exposure to secondhand smoke - appendicitis, for example. That shows there wasn't just a decline in hospitalizations in Toronto overall, which bolsters the argument that the heart and respiratory condition declines were related to less exposure to smoke, Naiman said.