

Get ready to butt out on Markham Stouffville Hospital property

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You have one more month to

kick the habit or take a walk the

next time you feel an urge to light a cigarette while you are at Markham

Stouffville Hospital.

A total smoking ban for both hospital campuses in Markham

and Uxbridge is effective May 31 and anyone wishing to smoke must leave the hospital property, including the parking lots.

The ban applies to all patients, visitors, staff, volunteers and physicians.

While the quest to become a 100-per-cent smoke-free property won't be implemented in phases, hospital administrators say the plan has been in the works for a year and all parties have been informed of the new rule through "extensive" communications and consultations over the last several months.

"People are pleased," said Julia Scott, the hospital's vice-president of clinical programs and chief nursing executive.

Ms Scott said the ban is a result of the hospital's commitment to providing a smoke-free environment for visitors, patients and staff as well as to the health and well-being of the surrounding communities.

She said people are aware of health risks associated with second-hand smoke and patients are being informed of the ban prior to their appointments.

Currently, you can smoke nine metres away from the hospital's entrance outdoors and in the two designated smoking "huts" at the Markham site.

Designated smoking areas will be eliminated with the ban and people caught smoking on hospital grounds after May 31 will be asked to butt out without penalty, Ms Scott said.

However, those smoking within nine metres of the entrance, as prohibited by the province's Smoke-Free Act, could be fined by Public Health, Ms Scott said.

In 2002, Calgary Health Region became the first health organization in Canada to ban smoking. Since then, other hospitals, including York Central Hospital in 2008 and the Southlake Regional Health Centre in 2009, have followed suit.

But at least one hospital has decided not to pursue a smoking ban. Last November, the Dryden Regional Health Centre in northwestern Ontario rejected its medical advisory committee's recommenda-

tions to go smoke-free, citing respect for patient rights and concern about enforcement.

However, that argument isn't enough to persuade some anti-smokers.

"Smoking is not a right, it's a privilege," said Pippa Beck, a policy analyst with the Non-Smokers' Rights Association, a national tobacco control organization in Canada.

Ms Beck called cigarette "a lethal consumer product" and the movement to ban it inside and out of hospitals a trend.

'Smoking used to be enjoyable, but now we have to stand in the rain to smoke.'

She said there are good reasons, including financial savings, to implement a smoke ban in hospitals, where "vulnerable people are coming and going".

She said lots of hospitals want to make a statement in the community that they are socially responsible by moving away from designated smoking areas.

"We know smoking affects every single cell in your body," Ms Beck said. "A smoke-free environment helps smokers gain control over addiction. Most smokers want to quit, even the most hardcore smokers."

Michael J. McFadden disagrees.

A 45-year smoker by choice and the author of *Dissecting Antismokers' Brains*, Mr. McFadden is a member of the Smokers Club and Citizens Freedom Alliance, a non-profit group not funded by the tobacco industry.

He questioned whether or not hospitals have the right to "dictate" patient behaviour that's "not deeply, immediately and fundamentally affecting their treatment at the hospital".

"Smoking used to be enjoyable, but now we have to stand in the rain to smoke," he said. "We are not rats. We don't need to be conditioned."

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