

New York statewide smoking ban signed into law

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ALBANY, New York (AP) -- A statewide smoking ban was passed Wednesday by the Legislature and immediately signed by Gov. George Pataki, making New York the third state to stamp out cigarettes in virtually all businesses.

Scheduled to take effect in July, the measure largely mirrors a smoking ban starting Sunday in New York City.

The legislation ends smoking in most places where it is still allowed: bars, certain restaurants, betting parlors, bowling alleys, pool halls and even company cars. It calls for fines up to \$1,000 per violation.

Exemptions include private residences, personal cars, Indian casinos and "cigar bars" already registered in New York City.

Sponsors said the measure puts New York alongside California and Delaware as having the most stringent indoor smoking prohibitions in the nation and will improve the health of tens of thousands of employees.

"We passed New York state's strongest public health policy ever," said the bill's chief sponsor in the Senate, Republican Charles Fuschillo.

The measure was approved by the GOP-controlled Senate 57-4 and the Democrat-dominated Assembly 96-44.

Lise DeWald Stoll, Pataki's spokeswoman, said the governor signed the measure despite having "reservations." She declined to elaborate.

The bill had its critics.

Sen. John Sabini, a Democrat who represents New York City's borough of Queens, said the state was doing a disservice to bar and restaurant owners who've built rooms with ventilation systems to comply with an exemption to the city's ban. The state law carries no such exemption.