




INDIA

Howrah



Intervention area: Tobacco control

City action: Becoming an official 'smoke-free city'



GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
OFFICE OF DISTRICT MAGISTRATE
HOWRAH , WEST BENGAL

SMOKE-FREE HOWRAH

It is matter of pride and glory for us to declare the district of Howrah a "SMOKE-FREE District" in compliance to the Section-4 of COTPA, 2003 and subsequent smoke-free rules framed therein.

Date: 31st May , 2017
Place: Howrah

Chakrabarti
District Magistrate
Howrah

Chakrabarti
Commissioner
Howrah City Police

Chakrabarti
Superintendent of Police
Howrah Rural District Police

Chakrabarti
Chief Medical Officer of Health
Howrah

Chakrabarti
District Nodal Officer- NTCP &
Dy. Chief Medical Officer of Health-II
Howrah

Smoke-free efforts in India gained momentum when revised smoke-free rules came into force on 2 October 2008, further strengthening national tobacco control legislation and empowering action to protect the public at large from second-hand smoke exposure. Several jurisdictions in India have begun implementing legislation to protect people from second-hand smoke. However, many of these measures have not been comprehensive, and as a result, implementation and compliance at subnational level is variable.

In June 2010, Howrah's District Administration, with support from civil society organizations, launched the "Smokefree Howrah" campaign. This effort, supported by the national Department of Health and Family Welfare, was the first in a series of interventions to advance tobacco control in the district. A comprehensive workplan was developed with the support of two civil society organizations – Cancer Foundation of India, and Manbhumi Ananda Ashram Nityananda Trust (MANT) – and between 2010 and 2014, the campaign enabled capacity-building among stakeholders and established coalitions and networks, and an institutional framework for enforcement.

With the commitment of the Mayor, District Administration and the police, the Smokefree Howrah initiative was subsequently expanded to educational institutes, health-care facilities and other public and private workplace environments, including the hospitality sector. In 2015, enforcement of the law was strengthened by penalties for violating smoke-free laws. Growing and widespread public support for the Smokefree Howrah Campaign began to denormalize smoking in public places and tobacco use in general. Howrah was officially declared smoke free on World No Tobacco Day, 31 May 2017, based on a compliance assessment survey where no active smoking was found at more than 92% public places.¹

For effective implementation of the law, enforcement teams of officials from various departments including police, health, education, the District Administration and the Municipal Corporation were formed. Additional police officers were deployed to enforce the law, backed up by regular inspections of public places by Municipal Corporation officers including Food and Drug and Sanitation inspectors. School teachers and students, media and civil society were encouraged to be vigilant and report violations of the smoke-free law to the police or the District Level Coordination Committee. The District Magistrate's office provided additional support during enforcement.

Several additional activities were undertaken to ensure high compliance, including regular inspection of major public places; wide visibility of "No Smoking" signage; an intensive awareness campaign for the public about the law and the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke; the generation of media coverage to enhance visibility of the campaign; and regular dissemination of information in all key government meetings.

After launching the campaign, MANT conducted a compliance study from December 2014 to January 2015, with a follow-up survey in April 2017 to identify the most common violations and where enforcement needed to be strengthened. Compliance studies were conducted based on key

provisions of the smoke-free rules, including: presence of no-smoking signage; absence of active smoking in public places; no-smoking aids; absence of cigarette or *bidi* butts; and no lingering smell of tobacco smoke. The findings of the compliance study demonstrated the feasibility of administering a simple, cost-effective method for assessing compliance that can inform enforcers and policy-makers.

Most of the smokers – over 94% – supported the smoke-free initiative because smoke-free public places encouraged smokers to make quit attempts and helped ex-smokers to avoid relapse. The compliance survey also found that the smoke-free law is legally and practically feasible, with most (75%) of those surveyed preferring enforcement of the laws over educational and awareness approaches.

The Howrah experience has wider implications for implementation of smoke-free legislation in India and other high-population settings, especially in South-East Asia. It shows that clear leadership among key stakeholders; allocation of clear roles and responsibilities to enforcement agencies for implementation and enforcement of tobacco control legislation; and media and civil society support are key to advancing smoke-free policies in complex urban settings like Howrah. The city's experience also shows that compliance studies can be useful for monitoring; for helping to inform the public and policy-makers about the success of smoke free interventions; and for identifying public places where violations occur and consequently informing enforcement efforts.

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¹ Report of Endline Survey for Assessing the Current Level of Compliance to the Sections of 4,5,6 of COTPA in 5 Districts of West Bengal. Kolkata, West Bengal: Manbhum Ananda Ashram Nityananda Trust, August 2017 (http://www.mant.org.in/sites/default/files/Total%20report_0.pdf, accessed 19 September 2019).