

# Soon, a helpline for complaints against smoking in public

Alifiya Khan

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THE NEXT time you light up in a public place, beware. Now, besides government-appointed officials, laypersons too can land you in trouble.

A helpline will soon be launched so victims of secondary smoke can complain directly to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) about people smoking in public.

The helpline was announced on Friday at the launch of a new campaign by the BMC, Tata Memorial Hospital and Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health.

On October 2, the Health ministry announced a ban on smoking in public places like restaurants, government offices, railway stations among others. The fine for smoking in such places is Rs 200.

Since the announcement of the ban, civic authorities have netted Rs 78,000 in fines.

"In the next two months, the helpline will start functioning," said Head of Preventive Oncology of Tata Memorial Hospital Dr S. Shastri. "We are

currently in talks with MTNL authorities to get the toll-free number," he said, adding that once the toll-free number becomes functional, any person who becomes a victim of passive smoking can call in to complain. "Not only will they be helped to protect

themselves but the smoker will be penalised."

BMC officials also announced the formation of a 'smoke free cell' for effective implementation of the ban on smoking in public places. "This will be the central coordination centre where all activities will be monitored besides formulating strategies to implement the ban," said BMC's Executive Health Officer Jairaj Thanekar.

Director of Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health Dr PC. Gupta released findings of a study on smoke-free workplaces in metros. "About 98 per cent of respondents from Mumbai strongly favoured smoke-free workplaces and smoke-free public places. Of these, 92 per cent believe that exposure to second-hand smoke is a serious health hazard."

