

Top Addictions Doctor: Don't Treat Smokers Like Animals

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A smoking lounge at Vnukovo airport. **Dmitry Abramov**

Amid a state crackdown on smoking, the country's top addictions doctor said Friday that long-time smokers cannot be cured and should not be "treated like animals" as they indulge in their habit.

Yevgeny Bryun, the chief narcologist at the Health and Social Development Ministry, told reporters that smokers "pay for their sin" through tobacco taxes, so the government has an obligation to provide "civilized, humane conditions" where smokers can "fulfill their painful needs."

Designated smoking areas should be reasonably comfortable with good ventilation, but many do not meet this standard, he said.

"Airports are now setting aside places to smoke, [but] these places are impossible to enter," he said, Interfax reported. "This is an outrage. This is treating man like an animal, because he has paid for his sin."

Bryun urged the state to show compassion toward smokers.

"You cannot change the habit of a person who has smoked from childhood," he said. "He will never give up tobacco. But he is a living, breathing human being, and he needs to be provided with a place where he can smoke freely."

The Health and Social Development Ministry is considering a raft of bills aimed at convincing Russians to give up smoking, including raising excise taxes on cigarettes, banning smoking on all public transportation by 2014 and eliminating smoking in cafes, bars and restaurants by 2015. Displaying cigarettes at stores and other points of sale could also be outlawed.

Smoke breaks in stairwells, between cars on commuter trains and just about everywhere else are a common sight all over the country, which has more smokers per capita than any other country on the planet.

Nearly 40 percent of Russians, or 43.9 million people, smoke, according to research by the World Health Organization and Euromonitor International. More than 60 percent of all men smoke, as well as more than 20 percent of women. A quarter of all youth aged 13 to 15 smoke — 27 percent of boys and 24 percent of girls.

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