

Voluntary Smokefree Outdoor Dining Policies Not Enough to Protect Customers

A 2024 study by the Policy Research Center for Tobacco and the Environment of 10 restaurants in the City of San Diego found nicotine on tables in outdoor dining patios and on the hands of volunteers after who ate a meal, regardless of whether staff claimed smoking was allowed.

Methods

1

Researchers Called Restaurants with Two Questions:



"If I came for dinner later today, is it ok if I smoke on your patio?"



"What about vaping? Is it okay if I vape on your patio?"



2

Researchers Selected 10 of Those Restaurants:

5

Where Staff Said YES You May Smoke or Vape



5

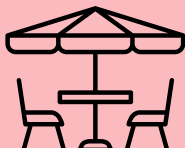
Where Staff Said NO You May Smoke or Vape



3

Researchers Tested Nicotine Levels at the Restaurants:

Samples were taken from the tables



and hands before and after eating a meal

Background

Smoking leaves behind toxic chemical residue that contains **over 25 chemicals listed under California's Prop 65** that are known to be hazardous to human health, such as nicotine and other carcinogens.

The City of San Diego is the **largest city in the County** that allows smoking in outdoor dining patios.



Results

100% of restaurants visited **had detectable levels of nicotine** on their patio tables, even if they said no to smoking, but **restaurants that did not allow smoking were less likely** to have levels of concern*.

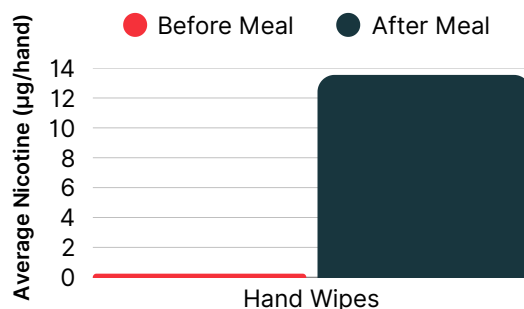


40% of restaurants who said **NO** to smoking had nicotine levels of concern* on tables.



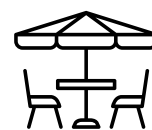
60% of restaurants who said **YES** to smoking had nicotine levels of concern* on tables.

90% of volunteers' hands tested positive for nicotine after their visit.



The average level of nicotine found on volunteers' hands was

56x higher



after eating a meal in an outdoor dining patio in San Diego.

Conclusion

Customers who eat in outdoor dining patios **pick up nicotine and carcinogens** on their hands from patio tables, even at restaurants that say they do not want their customers to smoke. This exposure is **more likely to be at levels of concern* if the restaurant does allow smoking**.

While restaurants' voluntary policies may offer some protection for customers, a **city-wide smokefree policy with clear measures for education and enforcement** could **increase awareness and compliance**.

*Levels of concern" refers to detectable levels of nicotine above background levels expected to be found in a non-smoking environment.

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