

Governor signs statewide smoking ban

By David Mendell

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Gov. Rod Blagojevich today signed into law a statewide smoking ban that beginning in January will kick smokers out of bars, restaurants and just about every other public place where they might still be hanging out.

The legislation ends the patchwork of smoking bans that Chicago and 44 other Illinois communities have put in place since 2005, which has created competition for smokers across city borders. Chicago patrons will have to snuff out their cigarettes in taverns and restaurants with bar areas on Jan. 1, six months earlier than the deadline set by the city.

Blagojevich signed the legislation at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, surrounded by medical professionals, cancer survivors and other anti-smoking advocates.

"This law will save lives," Blagojevich said. "The realities are that smoking kills people. ... My only regret is that this took so long."

Advocates said earlier this year that the legislation would make Illinois the 19th state to impose a broad smoking ban.

Chicago's smoking ban took effect Jan. 16, 2006, and covered areas ranging from restaurants to CTA train platforms and bingo halls. But free-standing bars and restaurants with bar areas were given until July 1, 2008, to eliminate smoking.

The state legislation kicks in before the Chicago deadline and supersedes weaker community rules. Local officials could impose more restrictive rules, however.

The new state law prohibits smoking in all public buildings and in most businesses and government vehicles. Smoking will be illegal in bars and restaurants, as well as places ranging from student dormitories to private homes in which businesses open to the public are operated.

Opponents contended the legislation will destroy already troubled small businesses.

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