

NYCHA'S SMOKE-FREE POLICY

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires all public housing authorities to have a smoke-free policy in place by July 30, 2018. The HUD regulations are intended to improve indoor air quality, benefit the health of public housing residents and staff, reduce the risk of fires, and lower overall maintenance costs. Secondhand smoke increases the risk of asthma attacks, respiratory illness, stroke, heart disease, and lung cancer in nonsmoking adults and children. Children and seniors, nearly half of NYCHA residents, are often the most impacted by secondhand smoke. Eliminating smoking indoors and close to buildings is the best way to protect people from exposure to secondhand smoke.

NYCHA's smoke-free initiative, Smoke-Free NYCHA, is designed to create healthier homes for residents and healthier working environments for employees by reducing exposure to secondhand smoke and providing support to residents and employees who smoke and want to quit. The new policy takes effect on July 30, 2018.

NYCHA's Smoke-Free Policy

NYCHA prohibits the smoking of tobacco products inside public housing apartments; in all indoor common areas; and within twenty-five (25) feet of public housing buildings or to NYCHA's property boundary if less than twenty-five (25) feet from a NYCHA building. Smoking in these areas is a violation of the public housing lease. Prohibited tobacco products are any item that involves the ignition and burning of tobacco leaves, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and water pipes (hookahs).

In addition, using electronic cigarettes (also called e-cigarettes or e-cigs) in indoor common areas is prohibited under local law. Local law does not prohibit the use of electronic cigarettes outdoors or inside apartments.

It is the responsibility of residents to inform their guests and visitors of the smoke-free policy and to ensure guests and visitors do not violate the policy. Residents are accountable for their own violations of the policy, as well as violations of their guests and visitors. The policy is about the smoke, not the person who smokes. NYCHA shall not deny housing to an eligible family because a household member is a smoker.

Amending Leases

In accordance with HUD regulations, NYCHA is amending its public housing lease to include smoke-free provisions, which are binding on all residents. For new residents, the lease will contain smoke-free provisions. Existing residents will receive a smoke-free lease addendum by mail. The lessee (and co-lessee) must sign and return the lease addendum, which may be returned to the Property Management office in person, returned electronically, or returned by mail.

The smoke-free lease addendum states the following:

Your lease will be amended as follows: 12(dd): To assure that, in compliance with the Landlord's Smoke-Free Policy, the Tenant, any member of the household, a guest, or another person under the Tenant's control, shall not smoke prohibited tobacco products in restricted areas, as described in the Landlord's Smoke-Free Policy. Restricted areas include, but are not limited to, the Leased Premises, all interior areas of the Development or other developments of the Landlord, and areas within 25 feet of development buildings, or to the property boundary where that boundary is less than 25 feet from the property line of a development building. Prohibited tobacco products include, but are not limited to, cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and hookahs (water pipes).

The Landlord's adoption of the requirements in this paragraph 12(dd) does not make the Landlord a guarantor of the Tenant's or any other resident's health or of the smoke-free condition of restricted areas. The Landlord specifically disclaims any implied or express warranties that the Landlord's public housing properties will have higher or improved air quality or will be free from secondhand smoke.

The Landlord will take reasonable steps to enforce the requirements of this paragraph 12(dd) utilizing a graduated enforcement policy, as provided in the Landlord's Smoke-Free Policy.

Graduated Enforcement

In consultation with residents, staff, and the New York City Department of Health and consistent with HUD guidance, NYCHA has formulated a graduated enforcement approach to address violations of the Smoke-Free Policy. Graduated enforcement means NYCHA will respond to violations with escalated warnings and specific, progressive enforcement remedies while also connecting residents to resources.

Violations will be documented. NYCHA staff observing violations will report them to the Property Management office. Residents may report violations by calling the Customer Contact Center or notifying the Property Management office and providing details of the violation. Property management staff will not be able to identify every violation of this policy. Failure to enforce any part of this policy does not negate NYCHA's right to enforce the lease and policy at any future time.

Property Management staff will begin an informal resolution process if one or more of the following occurs:

1. One documented observation by NYCHA employees who know or reasonably can determine the identity of the violator; of:
 - a. A household member, guest, or other visitor smoking in a restricted area; or
 - b. Evidence of use of a prohibited tobacco product in a restricted area. Some examples include: observing an ashtray containing used cigarettes, or smelling tobacco smoke emanating from an apartment.
2. Three recorded resident complaints to Property Management staff and/or three calls to the Customer Contact Center regarding:
 - a. Observing a resident, guest, or other visitor smoking in a restricted area; or
 - b. Reporting the smell of tobacco smoke emanating from another resident's apartment.

After a staff member has observed a resident violating the policy, or in response to multiple resident-generated complaints that a resident has violated the policy, Property Management will conduct an informal conference with the resident to discuss the violation or violations. Property Management will provide materials to educate the resident on smoking, the health effects of secondhand smoke, strategies to take the smoking outside the buildings and the 25-foot perimeter, and available smoking cessation resources. During the meeting the lessee will agree in writing to comply with the smoke-free policy and will acknowledge that further violations can result in the commencement of termination of tenancy proceedings.

If the household attends the informal resolution meeting and complies with the smoke-free policy for one year or more from the date of the informal resolution meeting, but violates the smoke-free policy thereafter, staff starts the informal resolution process over again.

Property Management staff will commence termination of tenancy proceedings if one or more of the following occurs:

1. The household fails to appear at the informal resolution meeting and does not respond within fourteen (14) calendar days of the scheduled date; or
2. The household participates in the informal resolution meeting and a resident, guest or other visitor violates the smoke-free policy within one year of the date of the informal resolution meeting.

NYCHA will also promote employee adherence to the policy through staff training, employee communication, and other means.

Reasonable Accommodation

Use of a prohibited tobacco product in a restricted area is not a reasonable accommodation of a disability. A disabled resident who is mobility impaired and uses a prohibited tobacco product may request a transfer to a lower floor as a reasonable accommodation to enable him/her to access areas outside his/her building in which smoking is not prohibited.

Partnering with Residents, the NYC Health Department and Other Leaders

Since the release of the HUD Rule, NYCHA has engaged residents, staff, city agencies, experts in smoking cessation, and others in dialogue about smoking and health. Smoke-free housing policy is fundamentally about promoting healthy living and working environments, and NYCHA will continue to work collaboratively to develop strategies and resources to educate residents about the health risks of exposure to secondhand smoke and to connect residents to cessation services for those who want to quit.

NYCHA will work to advance Smoke-Free NYCHA implementation in alignment with other agency initiatives to achieve safe, clean, and connected communities. In any residential context smoke-free policy is an important component to healthy and sustainable housing, particularly for children, seniors, and residents of all ages with vulnerable health conditions.