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Our Opinion: Beshear's smoke ban good lead for 2015

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Gov. Steve Beshear issued an executive order Thursday that bans employees and visitors from using tobacco products in some 3,000 state government buildings. In a news conference announcing his decision, the governor said he hopes his action will create momentum for the General Assembly to pass a statewide smoking ban in 2015.

We also hope state lawmakers get behind a smoking ban when the General Assembly convenes next year.

“When it comes to preventable illnesses and death, nothing in Kentucky is as devastating as smoking and tobacco use,” Beshear said. “Yet Kentuckians continue to use tobacco more than the residents of any other state. And as a result we lead the nation in cancer deaths.”

Beshear’s order includes chewing tobacco and electronic cigarettes. It does not include buildings used by the legislature, courts and state constitutional officers. The governor gave an exemption to outdoor tourist attractions, which includes state parks.

Opponents of smoking bans frequently argue that a ban violates the rights of private business owners — especially restaurant owners. But they fail to account for the rights of nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke, which is linked to cancers and cardiovascular diseases.

Also, the complaint that smoking bans hurt business does not hold up.

Kentucky cities that have approved public smoking bans — including Hopkinsville — have proven that restaurants survive just fine without smoking sections. In fact, many businesses gain customers who previously stayed away because they did not want to breathe secondhand smoke.

The governor’s executive order is a temporary solution. The next governor who takes office in 2016 could reverse the decision. But at least Beshear’s stand forces the issue higher on the state’s agenda.

It is time for Kentucky lawmakers to adopt a statewide smoking ban.

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