



PRESS RELEASE

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McConnell: 'local authorities could extend smoke ban'

First minister Jack McConnell has told Children in Scotland that local authorities could be encouraged to extend the smoking ban to cover external areas used by children.

In an interview with *Children in Scotland* magazine marking the introduction of the smoking ban and focusing on children's health, the first minister said he was struck by the support for the ban among young people, and indicated that he wants to make "being fitter and eating healthier" a priority for the country's children.

The first minister said: "We have encouraged local authorities to consider the benefits of introducing smoke-free policies in external areas where children and young people go, like school playgrounds and parks. This will help to discourage young people from being influenced by what they may see as an adult activity."

He was blunt in his assessment of the need to deliver improved health for Scotland's children. "We all need to be fitter and eat healthier," he said. "This is a key priority for me and for Scottish ministers. Scotland still has a terrible health record, even though there are real signs of improvement."

The first minister stressed the importance of meeting key targets on children's health, revealing plans to issue an Action Framework for Children and Young People's Health for consultation soon.

Commenting on this pledge, George Youngson, consultant paediatric surgeon at NHS Grampian said: "The Action Framework would help place children's health matters at the top of the Executive's in-tray. It would act as an important road map in improving - and making more consistent - health care for children throughout Scotland."

The first minister also promised a new public information campaign to "reinforce" the Executive's message to young people on the potential dangers of cannabis misuse. Neil McKeganey, professor of drug misuse research at the University of Glasgow, welcomed this initiative.

He said: "Over the last 18 months or so there has been enormous and regrettable confusion as to what the government's position on cannabis is. In the minds of many young people cannabis has acquired the status of hardly even ranking as an illegal drug at all. The focus of

policy and education now needs to be squarely directed at lowering the proportion of young people smoking cannabis. If we fail in this regard we will undoubtedly see growing numbers of young people experiencing serious mental health problems caused by, or exacerbated by, their use of cannabis.”

(ends)

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Notes for editors:

- **The ban on smoking** in enclosed public spaces aims to protect workers and the general public from the harmful effects of passive smoking. The new law comes into effect at 6am on Sunday March 26, 2006. It bans smoking in ‘no-smoking premises’ by: creating an offence of permitting others to smoke in no-smoking premises; creating an offence of smoking in no-smoking premises; creating an offence of failing to display warning notices in no-smoking premises; setting out the powers of enforcement officers to enter no-smoking premises; and creating an offence of failing without reasonable cause to give one’s name and address on request by an enforcement officer.

- **Children in Scotland** is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.

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