

California bans smoking in jails

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed a bill to ban tobacco products in state prisons.

Inmates and staff in adult and youth prisons will be unable to smoke from next year, the bill says.

Supporters say the move will help improve the health of 160,000 inmates, as well as saving money on healthcare.

Critics of Mr Schwarzenegger - who last year set up a tent outside his smoke-free state office to smoke cigars - say the ban will have limited benefits.

They also say enforcing the ban will be difficult.

'Negligible benefits'

Tim Leslie, the Republican member of the state assembly who wrote the bill, said the legislation would "drastically reduce" prison healthcare costs.

"The governor has put us on the road to saving taxpayer dollars and prisoners' lives," he said, according to the Associated Press news agency.

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really save a lot of money**

Leonard Padilla
former prisoner

Bounty hunter Leonard Padilla, a former prisoner who ran for governor in California last year, told the BBC's The World Today programme that the financial and medical benefits to the state's 35 million residents would be negligible.

Cigarettes are a powerful currency in prisons, Mr Padilla said, and the ban risked creating "problems that are greater than the possibility of some inmates having lung cancer".

"He ought to stop it in the whole state of California. If nobody smoked in the whole state it would really save a lot of money," he added.

"But if you would imagine how many people would not have lung cancer in the state of California if he just outlawed cigarette smoking in the whole state, that would be something that I would possibly be involved in backing," he said.

Jim Lindburg, legislative director for the Friends Committee on Legislation, told the AP that a more effective approach would be to encourage prisoners to stop smoking by providing them with nicotine patches and gum.

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