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## The Smoke-Free Ontario Act: Extend Protection to Children in Vehicles

### The Issue

Infants and children are more severely affected by exposure to second hand smoke than adults because they are smaller and have higher respiration rates.<sup>1,2,3</sup> New evidence implicates second hand smoke in sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), childhood cancer, leukemia, brain cancer, asthma and respiratory disease in children.<sup>1,3</sup> While levels of second hand smoke in vehicles can be far higher than those found in smoky bars,<sup>1,3,4</sup> children continue to be exposed to smoke in private vehicles in Canada<sup>5,6</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

The 2006 *Smoke-Free Ontario Act* prohibits smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces, including company vehicles, but exempts private vehicles.<sup>8</sup> While high levels of public support for banning smoking in private vehicles have been shown in Australia,<sup>9,10</sup> no recent Canadian data have been reported. This *Update* presents Ontarian public opinion data on support for bans on smoking in vehicles carrying children.

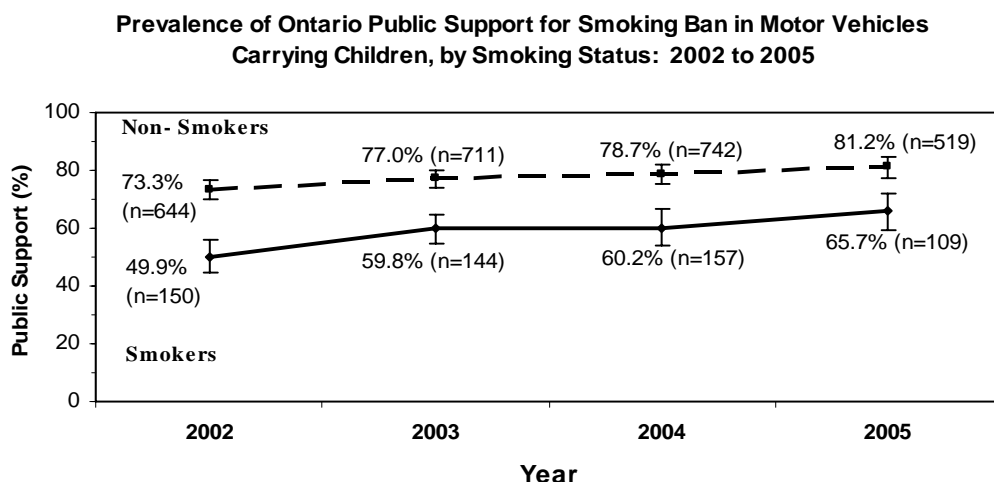
### Data Sources and Methodology

We analyzed cross-sectional data from the *CAMH Monitor*<sup>11</sup> (2002-2005), an ongoing, monthly, random-digit-dialing telephone survey of the Ontario population aged 18 years and older that employs a region-stratified two-stage (household, respondent) probability sample design. We examined level of agreement with the statement, “(t)here should be a law that says that parents can not smoke inside their car if children are present.”

Responses of “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” were considered supportive of a ban, (“don’t know”s were included in the denominator), and results were stratified by smoking status. All survey estimates were *weighted*; variance and statistical tests were corrected for each survey’s sampling design.

### Findings

- Since 2002 in Ontario, public support for banning smoking in motor vehicles carrying children increased significantly from 68% in 2002 to 78% in 2005. Level of support has increased even more since first measured in 1996 (55%), a 42% increase over the decade.
- Significant increases occurred among smokers (50% to 66%) and nonsmokers (73% to 81%) during the 2002-2005 period. Earlier in 1996, support was 60% among nonsmokers and 39% among smokers.



## Discussion

Our results show substantial and increasing public support in Ontario for banning smoking in motor vehicles carrying children. Furthermore, a large majority of smokers support such a ban. Legislators in many other jurisdictions have enacted legislation prohibiting smoking in a car transporting a child (Arkansas),<sup>12</sup> approved an impending ban (Puerto Rico, Louisiana),<sup>13,14,15</sup> put a comparable bill in progress (California),<sup>16</sup> or considered similar legislation (Pennsylvania and Utah).<sup>17,18</sup> With high levels of public support in Ontario, legislation to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children warrants the immediate attention of our legislators to protect vulnerable child passengers from involuntary exposure to second hand smoke inside motor vehicles.

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