

Revenues up from smoke-free bars, restaurants

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. --The state's smoking ban apparently hasn't hurt business at bars and restaurants as owners feared.

Tax revenues from bars and restaurants rose about 20 percent since the ban was enacted March 1, according to the state Division of Taxation, which collects taxes on sales.

From March through June of this year, the state collected \$5.83 million in taxes from bars and restaurants, said John J. Nugent, assistant tax administrator. That was a significant jump from the \$4.86 million collected at the same time last year.

Owners worried that smokers would stay home after the workplace ban became effective.

One business that did fall off was state-run keno sales, which dropped 9 percent, according to Gerald Aubin, who oversees the state's lottery operations. The games are mostly played in bars.

Aubin said he plans to draw people back with fall promotions, but if that doesn't work, it's OK.

"It's worth the loss in revenue for the gain in health of the people in these facilities," Aubin said.

Calls to the state's stop smoking helpline are up from about 70 a month last summer to more than 1,100 in March. Attendance at state-run counseling sessions increased nearly 14 times, with 460 people seeking help in March.

"I think people were ready for this," said Robert Vanderslice, of the Department of Health.