

Health Department Offering Free Radon Test Kits

By [Chris Grunert](#)

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The Orange County Health Department is offering free radon testing kits to use in your home. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and the number one leading cause among non-smokers.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas but when high levels enter a house it can become toxic, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. It is a colorless, odorless gas that can seep through cracks in the walls.

The EPA has identified more than 20,000 deaths each year from radon exposure.

The best way to protect you and your family from radon is to test your home. If unsafe levels of radon are identified, there are radon reduction systems that can reduce levels in a home by up to 99 percent, according to the Orange County Health Department.

Radon is present at elevated levels in about seven percent of homes in North Carolina, according to data collected by the Radiation Protection Section in the Division of Health Service Regulation.

This month is National Radon Action Month, so the Health Department is offering free test kits while supplies last. The free kits are available at the Orange County Health Department's Environmental Health Office located at 131 West Margaret Lane, Suite 100 in Hillsborough.

Durham County cracks down on e-cigarettes

By **David Hudnall**



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Another new law for the New Year: **Vapes** are now the same as cigs in the eyes of Durham County law enforcement. That means **no more e-cigarettes** on city or county property, including parks and trails and within a 100-foot radius of bus stops. Bars and restaurants can still decide for themselves whether they want to be vape-friendly, per state law.

"We have sent out letters to local restaurants to let them know that it's within their right to restrict its use," says Durham County Public Health director **Gayle Harris**.

Wake County has a similar county-property e-cig ban. Orange County hasn't yet added e-cigarettes to its Smoke-Free Public Places Rule, but communications manager **Stacy Shelp** says the county's board of health will be considering action this year.

Jason Joyner, lobbyist for a klatch of brick-and-mortar shop owners, e-liquid makers and other vape-product suppliers known as the **N.C. Vaping Council**, says Durham County's decision was no big surprise.

"Every county or municipality has the right to do it, but I did find it interesting that [Harris'] tagline on the announcement was basically, 'We know it's not as safe as clean air, so we're going to ban it in public places,'" Joyner says. "Well, if that's the precedent, then what else do we ban? **Bus exhaust**? What about the bull at the ballpark that blows out the huge cloud of smoke when the batter hits a home run? Is that within 50 or 100 feet of the public sidewalk?"

Moe Makki, of Cloud Vape Lounge in south Durham, says he's not too worried about the ban. "I'm more worried about the juice tax," he says.

North Carolina recently became the first state in the country to pass a tax—5 cents per milliliter—on e-liquid. (That's the juice that fills up those complex-looking vaping instruments that are en vogue these days.) The law went into effect this past July. Gregory Conley of the **American Vaping Association**, a national advocacy group, sees a connection between the tax and the fact that North Carolina is tobacco country.

"The reason that tax passed is because **R.J. Reynolds** supported it," Conley says. The Winston-Salem-based company has an e-cig product, VUSE, but it's what's referred to as a *cigalike*, which is disposable and doesn't require the purchase of e-liquid. "Tobacco companies don't want to shut down the e-cigarette product category completely, because they offer some e-cig products. But they want to erect barriers to keep new businesses from competing."

Harris says the first six months of the ban are meant to be educational. "We're just trying to **get the word out**," she says. "We're not trying to fine anybody. You'd have to ignore several warnings to get a fine."

Reach the INDY's Triangulator team at triangulator@indyweek.com.



Durham County Bans E-Cigarette Use In Public Places

By [Joey DeVito](#)

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Durham County has closed the loophole that allowed electronic cigarette use in public places. The ban will begin January 1, 2016.

“The enforcement part will come into play in July of 2016,” said health department director Gayle Harris. “We’re going to spend the next six months putting the signage up, educating people and doing a better job campaigning.”

The ban will make it illegal to use e-cigarettes in places such as sidewalks, parks, bus stops and other public property, except where there is a permitted smoking section.

“What we’ve seen with the introduction of electronic nicotine delivery systems has been an uptick in the use with teenagers,” she said. “We certainly don’t want to create an environment that sends the message that smoking is okay.”

Harris said non-smoking areas will be designated with the standard no smoking sign, but these areas will also include a sign that lets residents know e-cigarettes are not allowed.

“There is now a universal symbol for electronic nicotine delivery systems that will also be included within a circle with a line through it,” she said.”

In Orange County, there are a number of places, such as schools, libraries and UNC athletics facilities, which currently ban the use of e-cigarettes. However, they do not fall under the Orange County smoke free public places rule.

“At this point they are not looking to extend the rule to include e-cigarettes,” said Orange County Health Department public information officer Stacy Shelp. “At this point the place is to research this issue more and look at the health implications and whether or not they want to take action on it in the new year.”

Orange County Honored For Use Of Life Saving Drug

By [Joey DeVito](#)

Posted December 8, 2015 at 12:01 pm



Orange County received the Excellence in Innovation Award from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, on Monday night, for the Naloxone Project, which has saved the lives of four people who have overdosed on opioids.

Officers across the county have started carrying naloxone kits, which help combat the effects of a heroin overdose.

“With naloxone it’s really neat because it builds a bridge,” said Captain Chris Attack of the Carrboro Police Department. “You basically have more time to get that person to medical facilities where they can bring that person out of that danger.”

He said it cost his department \$700 to train and supply all of their officers.

During an opioid overdose, the brain tells the body to stop breathing. Sheriff Charles Blackwood said naloxone starts the breathing process again, but in a way that is safe for both officers and the person involved.

“When you have someone that may come out of an opioid overdose they’re violent, often times very violent, to the point you’d rather they go back to sleep” he said. “But sleep is death. This minimal dose will allow you to start breathing again, but you don’t come back in a combative state.”

Orange County is the first health department to take advantage of the 2013 Good Samaritan/Naloxone Access legislation, allowing doctors, family and friends to administer naloxone to someone who overdoses on opioids, without being prosecuted.

"Naloxone, also known as Narcan, quickly and effectively reverses overdose, if administered in time. This program places Orange County on the map, leading the way for other communities to follow this cost effective, life-saving example," said Dr. Colleen Bridger, director of the Orange County Health Department.

Because of Orange County regulation, before EMS is allowed on the scene, police officers must arrive first and make sure it is safe for unarmed personnel.

"It may take (EMS) a minute or two, three minutes depending on where they're staging, so if the officer can do that quick assessment, assemble the kit and administer that naloxone, you're talking minutes," Attack said. "Minutes when you're running out of oxygen, when you're brain is starving, when you may go into cardiac arrest because there's not enough oxygen, can really save a life."

Kim Woodward of Orange County EMS said medical staff has been carrying naloxone for nearly 30 years and due to changes made in 2013, non-medically trained officers are now able to carry it as well.

"Because the Good Samaritan Law expanded, it allowed lay-folks to give the naloxone," she said. "If lay-folks can give the naloxone, then non-medically trained folks, such as our law enforcement, could give the naloxone as well."

Attack said heroin use across Orange County is on the rise due to the federal government making it harder for people to get prescription opioids.

"It's a second or third chance at life for someone to get clean," he said. "I've seen neighbor's kids suffer with addiction and I can't imagine dealing with that on a daily basis so anything we can simply do to give someone a shot to get right."

Officers in Chapel Hill, Carrboro and across the rest of Orange County are now trained and carrying naloxone kits.

Blackwood said 97 percent of his staff has been trained.

Vaccination exemptions increase risk of disease

BURHAN KADIBHAI | PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 24, 2015

Vaccine-preventable diseases pose risks for possible outbreaks in schools in Orange County — and the rates reflect that risk.

Of the children enrolled in all Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, 15 have received medical exemptions and 127 have received religious exemptions from school-required vaccinations in the 2015-2016 school year.

BY THE NUMBERS

142 exemptions for 2015-2016

75 exemptions in 2008-2009

622 cases of pertussis in 2013

478 cases for under age 20

The number of religious exemptions in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools has increased since the 2008-2009 school year, when 75 students received exemptions.

Jeff Nash, spokesperson for CHCCS, said some parents do not vaccinate their children due to religious reasons, which is an approved exception policy, but there are only a few of these exceptions.

“The vaccination rates are high in our schools, but there is still room for improvement,” Nash said. “We are continuously educating students regarding safety.”

The Emerson Waldorf School, an independent pre-K to 12th grade school, has a student vaccination rate of approximately 62 percent, which is the lowest rate throughout Orange County public and private schools.

In 2013, 622 cases of the vaccine-preventable disease pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, were reported in North Carolina. 478 cases of the disease were people under the age of 20.

Judy Butler, the public health nursing supervisor for Orange County, said the issue of outbreak is not restricted locally, but is nationwide.

“There was a measles outbreak that affected several states that resulted from someone who was unvaccinated bringing measles from abroad,” Butler said.

Butler said she thinks educating parents to look at the proven data about vaccinations is the key to increasing the rate of child vaccinations.

“There were some studies that linked vaccinations to autism, and they have been disproved,” Butler said. “They have been found to be falsified, but a lot of people listen to those studies. That’s a small part of the population. The vast majority of people do believe in vaccinations.”

Butler said another issue is the importance of considering children with compromised immune systems, like those undergoing chemotherapy, because unvaccinated children may transfer diseases.

“We need to make sure all of us who can be vaccinated are to help those children, in my opinion,” Butler said.

Julie Upchurch, a UNC junior said she saw both sides of the vaccination argument.

“I am sure there are risks and benefits to both,” Upchurch said. “From the impression I have gotten, there has been a problem with children in schools contracting diseases they had not contracted previously because other children weren’t vaccinated.”

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Read more: <http://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2015/11/vaccination-exemptions-increase-risk-of-disease>