



NEWS RELEASE

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The Age to Buy Tobacco is now 21

Tobacco 21 reduces medical costs and improves Illinois' health

SPRINGFIELD – Effective July 1, 2019, people must now be at least 21-years-old to buy tobacco in Illinois, including cigarettes, chewing tobacco, e-cigarettes, and vapes. Governor JB Pritzker signed the initiative, known as Tobacco 21, on April 7, 2019. Illinois was the 7th state in the U.S. (tied with Virginia) to implement raising the tobacco purchasing age from 18 to 21 years.

“I’m so proud that Illinois became the first state in the Midwest to raise the purchase age for tobacco to 21,” said Gov. Pritzker. “This law will reduce costs for our state, make our schools and communities healthier places to learn and live, and most importantly, will save lives. I am grateful to Senate President John Cullerton and our legislators in the General Assembly, as well as all of the advocates and organizations who made this critical legislation possible.”

“Once again, we’ve seen the difference Governor Pritzker brings to office,” said Senate President John Cullerton. “He too recognizes this as a vital public health improvement that protects our children from a known danger and hopefully spares many from a lifetime of addiction and health problems.”

About 4,800 Illinois teens become new daily smokers each year. In 2016, 15.8% of Illinois adults smoked, resulting in an estimated 18,300 deaths each year associated with tobacco use. In 2017, 7.6% of high school students smoked on at least one day in the past 30 days.

“Nicotine is addictive, and adolescents and young adults are more susceptible to its effects because their brains are still developing,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “Delaying the age when youth first try tobacco can help reduce the probability that they will smoke as an adult. Raising the purchasing age will not only help reduce the number of people who smoke, but will also reduce medical costs in Illinois and make our communities healthier.”

Tobacco 21 will help keep tobacco out of high schools. Most underage tobacco users rely on social sources like friends and family to get tobacco. Approximately 90% of those who supply cigarettes to minors are themselves, under the age of 21.

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National data indicate about 95% of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21. According to a study from the National Academy of Medicine, Tobacco 21 policies could reduce overall smoking by 12% by the time today's teenagers become adults. The biggest decrease in tobacco use could be among youth ages 15-17 (25%) and 18-20 (15%).

Smoking-related health care costs in the U.S. are estimated at almost \$5.5 billion annually, with another \$5.3 billion lost due to smoking-related losses in productivity.

In addition to prohibiting the sale and sample distribution of tobacco products, e-cigarettes, and alternative nicotine products to individuals under age 21, the law:

- Requires tobacco and e-cigarette retailers to update all posted signage required by Illinois law with the minimum sales age of 21 for tobacco products, tobacco accessories, alternative nicotine products, e-cigarettes, and e-liquids and solutions, regardless of whether they contain nicotine.
- Requires tobacco and e-cigarette retailers to update age verification training programs for employees.
- Specifies age verification requirements for retailers, requiring a person who appears to be under the age of 30 to show government-issued photo identification.
- Clarifies penalties against retailers for violation of sales provisions - in a 24-month period, 1st offense - \$200; 2nd offense - \$400; 3rd offense - \$600; 4th or subsequent offense - \$800.
- Removes penalties for youth possession of covered products, including fines (previously \$50-\$100) or attendance at a smoker's education or youth diversion program.

Smoking at an early age increases the risk of lung cancer. For most smoking-related cancers, the risk rises as the individual continues to smoke. Among young people, the short-term health consequences of smoking include respiratory effects, addiction to nicotine, and the associated risk of using other drugs.

Currently, 16 states have raised the tobacco purchasing age from 18 to 21.

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