

Raising the Minimum Sales Age for Tobacco to 21 Will Reduce Youth Tobacco Use and Save Lives

Tobacco use is a serious health hazard, causing or worsening a wide range of adverse health effects, including lung cancer, respiratory infections, and asthma. Adolescents and young adults are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and nicotine addiction, causing lasting, adverse consequences on brain development.

Two states—California and Hawaii— as well as the District of Columbia have taken an important step to protect their kids from this threat by raising the minimum age of sale for all tobacco products to 21. Why 21? Increasing the minimum age of sale for tobacco products to at least 21 years old will significantly reduce youth tobacco use and save thousands of lives.

Here are a few reasons why raising the sales age to 21 will make a difference:

- Virtually all (94 percent) adult smokers had their first cigarette before turning 21, and most (81 percent) before age 18.
- Smokers aged 18 and 19 years old are a major supplier for younger kids who rely on friends, classmates and peers to buy tobacco products. Since students do not typically reach 21 years old while still in high school, increasing the age of sale would greatly reduce the number of high school students who could purchase tobacco products.

- Increasing the sales age for tobacco products to 21 will help counter the tobacco industry's efforts to target young people at a critical time when many move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking.
- A national sales age of 21 for alcohol sales resulted in reduced alcohol consumption among youth, decreased alcohol dependence and has led to a dramatic reduction in drunk driving fatalities. It's predicted that raising the national sales age for tobacco products will have similar effects.

The potential impact is significant.

According to a 2015 report from the National Academy of Medicine, if the minimum age were increased to 21 years of age:

- Tobacco use would decrease by 12 percent by the time today's teenagers were adults and smoking-related deaths will decrease by 10 percent.
- Smoking will be reduced by 25 percent for 15-17 year olds and 15 percent for 18-20 year olds.
- Nationwide, it could prevent 223,000 deaths among people born between 2000 and 2019, including 50,000 fewer dying from lung cancer, the nation's leading cancer killer.

Speak up for Tobacco 21 nationwide!

In addition to California, Hawaii and Washington DC, New York City, Boston, Chicago and hundreds of communities nationwide have made the change and led the way to increase the age of sale from 18 to 21.

American Lung Association's 'Tobacco 21' Initiative to Save Lives of Millennials, Future Generations by Raising Tobacco Sales Age to 21

Raising the minimum sales age for tobacco products to 21 will prevent tobacco-related illness, save 223,000 lives for those born between 2000 and 2019

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As part of its long-held mission to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through reducing tobacco use, the American Lung Association today launched "Tobacco 21," an initiative calling on the remaining 48 states and the District of Columbia to follow the lead of California and Hawaii, and raise the legal sales age for tobacco products to 21.

"Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable illness and death in the United States, and most adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21," said Harold P. Wimmer, National President and CEO of the American Lung Association. "The American Lung Association strongly supports raising the

minimum sales age for all tobacco products to 21 to reduce youth smoking, prevent a future generation of tobacco users and save thousands of lives every year."

In June of 2015, Hawaii passed a bill making it the first state to raise its minimum sales age for tobacco products to 21. California followed suit in May of 2016. In addition, 180 cities and communities in 14 different states have local Tobacco 21 laws in effect as of August 2016, including New York City, Boston and Chicago.

"Hawaii and California set the example for the rest of the country earlier this year. Now we're calling on all states to take action to protect young people from a life of tobacco addiction, poor health and early death," Wimmer said.

In 2015, the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), formerly the Institute of Medicine, released a report that found that increasing the minimum age of sale for tobacco products to at least 21 years old would significantly reduce youth tobacco use and save thousands of lives. Specifically, NAM predicts that smoking will be reduced by 25 percent among those 15-17 years old and 15 percent among those 18-20 years old if the tobacco sales age is increased to 21. This could prevent 223,000 deaths among people born between 2000 and 2019, including 50,000 fewer dying from lung cancer, the nation's leading cancer killer.

From the ages of 18 to 21, many smokers transition from experimenting to regular use. The majority of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21. Younger kids often rely on older classmates, aged 18 and 19, to supply them with tobacco products. Since few students reach 21 while still in high school, raising the minimum sales age to 21 virtually eliminates high school students

from being able to buy tobacco, and helps break the peer supply chain to many of these younger smokers.

"Increasing the sales age for tobacco products will also help counter the tobacco industry's efforts to target young people at a critical time when many move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking," said Wimmer.

Marketing to young people is a long-used tactic of the tobacco industry to increase sales, as illustrated by a 1981 document from the tobacco company RJ Reynolds, which analyzed data from the National Bureau of Economic Research, and reads: "If a man has never smoked by age 18, the odds are three-to-one that he never will. By age 21, the odds are twenty-to-one."

"The most effective way to protect our kids from the terrible toll of tobacco use is to make sure they never start smoking in the first place," Wimmer said. "More than 4,700 young people under 21 try their first cigarette every day, and 1,400 of them become regular daily smokers. One-third to one-half of these kids will die from smoking-related diseases. 'Tobacco 21' can help break this cycle of death and disease."

In 2014, the U.S. Surgeon General's report concluded that the nicotine found in tobacco products is not safe, and particularly dangerous for adolescents and young adults. Human brain development continues far longer than was previously realized, and nicotine use during this time has a negative impact on brain development, and has been associated with lasting cognitive and behavioral impairments on working memory and attention.

"Everyone deserves a fair shot at life, and we want young people to live full and healthy lives," Wimmer said. "By raising the minimum age to 21 for tobacco

sales, millennials and future generations will have the opportunity to avoid becoming the next generation hooked on tobacco use."

Learn more about youth tobacco use and lung health at Lung.org/tobacco21. For media interested in speaking with an expert about youth tobacco use, contact Allison MacMunn at the American Lung Association at Media@Lung.org or 312-801-7628.

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About the American Lung Association

The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, through research, education and advocacy. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to improve the air we breathe; to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families; and to eliminate tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases. For more information about the American Lung Association, a holder of the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Guide Seal, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) or visit: Lung.org.