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TIME TO KEEP TOBACCO OUT OF THE HANDS OF TEXAS TEENS

Broad coalition supports legislation to stop tobacco sales to Texans under 21

Stopping the sale of tobacco products to Texans under age 21 is sound policy and common sense, saves lives and dollars, and is overwhelmingly supported by Texans, according to a broad base of supporters who joined in a press conference Tuesday.

Texas legislators, Texas 21 (a coalition of more than 75 public health groups), physicians, and youth and military advocates voiced their support for House Bill 749 by Rep. John Zerwas, MD, (R-Richmond) and Senate Bill 21 by Sen. Joan Huffman (R-Houston). The bills would raise the minimum legal tobacco sale age from 18 to 21. HB 749 will be heard in House Public Health on Wednesday (March 6).

“It’s time for our state to do what it can to protect our youth from a lifetime of nicotine addiction, from a lifetime struggling with chronic disease, and from a lifetime cut short because of tobacco,” said Dr. John Carlo, chairman of the Texas Public Health Coalition and member of the Texas Medical Association’s Council on Legislation. “It’s time for T21.”

About 95 percent of smokers start before age 21. In Texas, 7.4 percent of high school students smoke and over 10 percent use e-cigarettes, while 10,400 kids become daily smokers every year. Nearly half a million (498,000) Texas kids alive now will ultimately die prematurely from smoking if current trends continue.

“I am astounded that it’s been well over five decades since the first Surgeon General’s Report in 1964 on Smoking and Health, since we’ve first known of tobacco’s carcinogenic effects,” said Carlo, a preventative medicine specialist. “It’s been almost 40 years since the tobacco industry was quoted calling ‘today’s teenagers’ ‘tomorrow’s potential regular customer’ – and yet, here we are, still having this fight. Tobacco use continues to be the number one cause of preventable chronic diseases and premature death in Texas.”

Passing a law to reduce tobacco use is a sound health policy that also pays tremendous dividends by preventing diseases that cost the most to treat, Zerwas said.

“As a physician, the health-related importance of this proposed legislation can’t be denied,” Zerwas said. “As chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, I’d also like to point out that Tobacco 21 isn’t just responsible public health policy, but it’s also fiscally responsible for the State of Texas.”

Every year [smoking costs Texas](#) \$8.85 billion in direct health care costs, \$1.96 billion in Medicaid costs and \$8.22 billion in lost productivity. In addition, each Texas household pays \$747 in state and federal taxes due to smoking-caused government expenditures.

More than two-thirds of Texas voters – 67 percent – favor raising the tobacco sale age to 21, Huffman said, citing a [statewide poll of voters commissioned by Texas 21](#). That support spans the state as well as political and ideological spectrums, from Republican to Democrat, from conservative to liberal.

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"I am encouraged by this poll that 2019 will be the year we pass a Tobacco 21 law," Huffman said. "I urge all Texans who agree to take a stand for our children and contact their senator and representative to ask them to support House Bill 749 and Senate Bill 21."

Huffman said she is especially concerned about the rapid rise in the use of e-cigarettes since the last Texas legislative session. [E-cigarettes must be covered by the proposed bills](#), she said.

A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that e-cigarette use grew nationally by 1.5 million kids between 2017-2018, erasing past progress in reducing youth tobacco use. The U.S. Surgeon General has issued an advisory declaring e-cigarette use among youth "an epidemic."

Kellen Kruk, a senior at Pineywoods Community Academy in Lufkin, said he's seen an astonishing surge in the use of e-cigarettes by his classmates. Kruk, 18, is founder and president of his school's "Say What!" (a statewide youth tobacco prevention coalition) as well as a local, state and national advocate for raising the tobacco age to 21.

"As an 18-year-old, I could go buy tobacco or e-cigarettes legally and share them with my peers," Kruk said. "I see students at my school who are already addicted to nicotine. They think it's cool to use e-cigarettes. Tobacco 21 needs to be implemented in Texas so that it takes tobacco out of the hands of high schoolers. We should be graduating with a diploma, not a lifelong addiction to tobacco."

Seven states have raised the legal minimum tobacco sale age to 21, along with at least 430 localities, including San Antonio.

Laws in two of those states exempt the military, meaning service members 18 and older can continue to purchase tobacco on and off military bases and installations. Such an exemption in Texas would be a mistake, said Brian Hayden of Universal City, a retired Air Force master sergeant and survivor of a heart attack, heart transplant and lung cancer. Hayden said his experiences have made him passionate that [a statewide law to stop the sale of tobacco to those under age 21 must include the military](#).

"Yes, Texans can join the military at age 18," Hayden said. "But it's flawed logic to argue that you should be old enough to smoke if you're old enough to fight for your country. Tobacco use is a lethal and addictive behavior, not some rite of passage or sign of adulthood."

The Texas 21 Coalition includes more than [75 health organizations](#), including the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Texas Academy of Family Physicians, Texas Medical Association, Texas Pediatric Society and Texas Public Health Coalition. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center is present as an educational resource only. More information can be found at www.texas21.org. Follow the Coalition on Facebook at [/texastobacco21](https://www.facebook.com/texastobacco21) and Twitter at [@TexasTobacco21](https://twitter.com/TexasTobacco21).

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The following fact sheets can be found at www.texas21.org:

[It's Time to Raise the Tobacco Age to 21 in Texas](#)

[Texas Overwhelmingly Supports Raising the Tobacco Age to 21](#)

[The Huge Toll of Tobacco in Texas](#)

[Electronic Cigarettes & Tobacco 21](#)

[Tobacco Use: Lethal & Addictive, And a Threat to Our Military](#)

[21 Reasons to Raise the Tobacco Sale Age to 21 in Texas](#)

[Raise the Tobacco Age to 21: We Can't Afford Not To](#)

U.S. State And Local Issues **Raising The Tobacco Age To**



Increasing the minimum sale age for tobacco products to 21 is a promising strategy to reduce smoking and other tobacco use among youth and save lives. Raising the sale age to 21 complements other strategies to reduce tobacco use, including higher tobacco taxes, strong smoke-free laws that include all workplaces and public places, and well-funded, sustained tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

Nearly all smokers start as kids or young adults, and these age groups are heavily targeted by the tobacco industry. Increasing the tobacco age to 21 will help to prevent young people from ever starting to smoke and to reduce the deaths, disease and health care costs caused by tobacco use.

"Raising the legal minimum age for cigarette purchaser to 21 could gut our key young adult market (17-20) ..."

– Philip Morris report, January 21, 1986

A March 2015 report by the Institute of Medicine (now called the National Academy of Medicine) strongly concluded that raising the tobacco age to 21 will have a substantial positive impact on public health and save lives.

The study found that increasing the tobacco age will significantly reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking; reduce smoking-caused deaths; and immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking, as well as their children.

Six states – California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Oregon, Hawaii and Maine – have raised the tobacco age to 21, along with at least 430 localities, including New York City, Chicago, San Antonio, Boston, Cleveland, Minneapolis, both Kansas Cities, and Washington, D.C. Some of the localities are in the states that subsequently enacted statewide laws.

Most Adult Smokers Start Smoking Before Age 21

National data show that about 95 percent of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21. The ages of 18 to 21 are also a critical period when many smokers move from experimental smoking to regular, daily use. While less than half of adult smokers (46 percent) become daily smokers before age 18, four out of five do so before they turn 21.

Nicotine is addictive, and adolescents and young adults are more susceptible to its effects because their brains are still developing. Delaying the age when young people first experiment with or begin using tobacco can reduce the risk that they will become addicted smokers.

Tobacco Companies Target Kids And Young Adults

Tobacco companies intentionally market to kids and young adults to recruit "replacement smokers" and protect company profits. They know nearly all users become addicted before age 21. Increasing the tobacco age to 21 will help counter the efforts of the tobacco companies to target young people at a critical time when many move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking.





Raising The Sale Age Will Help Keep Tobacco Out Of High Schools

Research shows that kids often turn to older friends and classmates as sources of cigarettes. Increasing the tobacco age to 21 would reduce the likelihood that a high school student will be able to legally purchase tobacco products for other students and underage friends.

About 350 kids under the age of 18 become regular smokers each day – one in three will eventually die as result. We should do everything we can to prevent young people from smoking and save lives. Increasing the tobacco age to 21 will help achieve these goals.

Last updated Jan. 10, 2019

Related Materials

- [States and Localities that Have Raised the Tobacco Sale Age to 21](#) 
- [Fact Sheet: Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21](#) 
- [Fact Sheet: Increasing the Sale Age for Tobacco to 21 Will Reduce Smoking and Save Lives \(short version\)](#) 
- [Building Strong Enforcement Into 21 Policies](#) 

- [Raising the Tobacco Sale Age to 21 and the Military](#) 
- [Responses to Misleading NATO/Swedish Match Arguments](#)
- [Institute of Medicine Report: Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products \(March 12, 2015\)](#)
- [Raising the Minimum Legal Sale Age to 21: Excerpts from the 2015 Institute of Medicine Report](#) 
- [Fact Sheet: Tobacco Companies Marketing to Kids](#) 
- [Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation](#)

Related Press Releases

- [New York Gov. Cuomo Proposes Bold Steps to Reduce Youth Tobacco Use, Including Raising Tobacco Sale Age to 21 \(Jan 14, 2019\)](#)
- [Hartford Acts to Protect Kids, Save Lives by Raising Tobacco Age to 21 \(Oct 23, 2018\)](#)
- [Illinois Governor Vetoes Measure to Raise Tobacco Sale Age to 21, Forfeiting Opportunity to Save Lives, Help Kids \(Aug 27, 2018\)](#)

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