



Tobacco 21 - What you need to know

[Tobacco 21](#) is a national campaign aimed at raising the minimum legal age of selling or purchasing tobacco product to 21 years. Supported by many organizations, including the American Heart Association, Institute of Medicine, and American Academy of Pediatrics, the campaign has sparked change across the country at the local, state, and national levels. Trenton became the 215th city to adopt Tobacco 21 on February 16, 2017. Here, we will answer some frequently asked questions regarding Tobacco 21, why it is vital, and what its impact will be. To read more about the passing of Tobacco 21 in Trenton, NJ, [click here](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why raise the legal age to purchase tobacco products to 21?

Raising the legal age to sell or purchase tobacco products decreases the chance of youth starting to smoke before they turn 18, which minimizes the chance of those youth developing a nicotine addiction and potentially smoking for life. The American Journal of Public Health states “individuals who begin smoking at a young age are more likely to become addicted, progress to daily smoking, become heavier tobacco users as adults, and have difficulty quitting.”ⁱⁱ

What are the benefits to passing a Tobacco 21 ordinance?

There are both health and economic benefits to raising the minimum legal age to buy tobacco products to 21. From a public health perspective, it saves hundreds of thousands of lives. According to *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*, “if the [minimum legal age] were raised now to 21 nationwide, there would be approximately 223,000 fewer premature deaths, 50,000 fewer deaths from lung cancer, and 4.2 million fewer years of life lost for those born between 2000 and 2019.”ⁱⁱ Additionally, it has been shown by the National Institutes of Health that as little as “...one cigarette per day over a lifetime caused 64 percent higher risk of earlier death.”^v The Institute of Medicine has concluded that “increasing the minimum age of legal access for tobacco products will likely prevent or delay initiation of tobacco use by adolescents and young adults. The age group most impacted will be those age 15 to 17 years.”ⁱ

From an economic standpoint, raising the legal age is also beneficial. According to the Tobacco 21 organization, “[a] city or town that creates fewer smokers will have higher socioeconomic status, better health status, better jobs, and better quality of life for all residents.”^{iv}

What types of tobacco products is the Tobacco 21 ordinance prohibiting?

The Tobacco 21 ordinance is prohibiting the sale, purchase, or giving of tobacco-related products such as cigars, chewing tobacco, pipe tobacco, snuff, and cigarettes in any form to someone under the age of 21. The ordinance also prohibits the sale, purchase, or giving of nicotine delivery products, such as “e-cigarettes” or other types of electronic smoking device, or any cartridge or other component of such device, or related products including but not limited to liquids, powders, gels or other forms of tobacco, nicotine, or other substances. For more details, [read the ordinance](#).



Won't kids just have someone older buy them tobacco products?

Not according to the *American Journal of Public Health*. In their report titled *Retail Impact of Raising Tobacco Sales Age to 21 Years*, “59% of 18- and 19-year olds have been asked by someone younger than 18 years to buy cigarettes for them. Also, high school students are less likely to have 21-year old adults than 18- to 20-year- old adults in their social circles, suggesting reduced opportunities to access tobacco from older buyers.”ⁱⁱ Since youth under 18 are less likely to know someone 21 and older who would buy them tobacco products, raising the minimum legal age to purchase tobacco to 21 decreases the chance of youth having access to tobacco products via their social circles.

For youth that do know someone older, it will now be illegal for someone 21 years of age or older to give to or buy tobacco products for someone younger, which is an additional barrier to access. According to the Trenton ordinance, “No person shall sell, distribute or give Tobacco or Nicotine Delivery Products to any person under the age of 21 years.”

Will this cause local tobacco retailers to lose sales or go out of business?

“If one assumes that the number of cigarettes smoked by 18- to 20-year- old smokers corresponds to the number of cigarettes sold to them or to others on their behalf, the maximum immediate loss of sales would be just 2% of the total cigarette sales in the United States.”ⁱⁱⁱ When Needham, MA increased the sales age to 21 in 2005, for example, not a single convenience store went out of business. Restaurant and bar owners had the same fear when smoking was banned, and this did not happen.^{iv}

When will the Tobacco 21 ordinance go into effect?

Tobacco 21 will go into effect 20 days after passing - meaning it will be in effect as of March 8, 2017.

What resources to quit are available to me if I currently smoke and am between 18-20 years old?

People can be referred to local healthcare delivery services, such as St. Francis Medical Center and Henry J. Austin Health Center. THT, through Trinity Health’s Transforming Communities Initiative, and other community partners, such as the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids-Trenton and the Trenton Department of Health and Human Services will also work directly with the schools to provide information on referrals to tobacco cessation services. People can also call the NJ Quitline for free telephone counseling and other resources: 1-866-NJSTOPS (657-8677). Their [website](#) also offers information about other tobacco cessation services in NJ.

What will be the consequences for retailers caught selling tobacco products to underage consumers?

Employees or retail owners who sell tobacco products to people under 21 will be fined \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second violation, and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.



I don't smoke. Why is this a benefit for me?

The effects of secondhand smoke also have an impact on those who don't smoke themselves, increasing the risk of developing smoking-related chronic diseases such as cancer, stroke, heart disease, temporary increases in blood pressure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Additionally, products containing nicotine have been proven to be dangerous when used by or around youth, pregnant women, and fetuses (Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the US Surgeon General and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health.).ⁱⁱⁱ

Sources:

ⁱ Institute of Medicine. Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products. Report Brief: March 2015.

http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/TobaccoMinAge/tobacco_minimum_age_report_brief.pdf

ⁱⁱ American Journal of Public Health. Retail Impact of Raising Tobacco Sales Age to 21 Years. Winickoff et al. November 2014, Vol. 104, No. 11.

<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302174>

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the US Surgeon General and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health. E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General. http://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/2016_SGR_Fact_Sheet_508.pdf

^{iv} Tobacco 21. Healthy Towns, Healthy Kids. Tobacco 21 Toolkit. 2016. http://tobacco21.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/T21HandBook1_2015.pdf

^v National Institutes of Health. No Safe Level of Smoking: Even Low-Intensity Smokers are at Increased Risk of Earlier Death. Dec. 5, 2016. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/no-safe-level-smoking-even-low-intensity-smokers-are-increased-risk-earlier-death>