



Tobacco Use: Lethal & Addictive, And a Threat to Our Military

The minimum age of military service does not equal readiness to enlist in a lifetime of nicotine addiction. Tobacco use is not a sign of adulthood, but does come with lasting health effects that extend well into adulthood. Tobacco companies target young people before they can fully appreciate the consequences of becoming addicted to the nicotine in tobacco.

THE FALSE MILITARY ANALOGY (“IF YOU’RE OLD ENOUGH TO FIGHT ...”)

Military leaders themselves recognize the toll tobacco takes on troop readiness and on the military health care system and are actively taking steps to reduce tobacco use in the military. Tobacco use remains this nation’s No. 1 preventable cause of premature death and disease, killing more than 480,000 Americans annually. The Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that 175,000 current active duty service members will die from smoking unless they are able to quit. Almost all smokers start smoking before the age of 21, and the ages of 18 to 21 are a critical period when many smokers move from experimental smoking to regular, daily use.

Tobacco companies have a long history of promoting tobacco to members of the military and have a vested interest in tobacco use by the military, an important market for recruitment of the next generation of smokers. Raising the tobacco age to 21 will help prevent our service members from starting to use this deadly and addictive product and support DoD efforts to reduce tobacco use among service members.

Alarming, many current military smokers — 36 to 40 percent — report starting tobacco use after joining the military. Given everything we know about what smoking does to the body and how it weakens our combat preparedness, it is unacceptable that troops smoke at higher rates than the general population and that more than 1 in 3 servicemembers who are current smokers started smoking after joining the military.

TOBACCO USE HURTS MILITARY READINESS AND IS COSTLY

While tobacco use takes an enormous toll on all users, it has particularly detrimental consequences for active duty military personnel. Tobacco use reduces physical fitness and endurance and is linked to higher rates of absenteeism and lost productivity. In addition, service members who use tobacco are more likely to drop out of basic training, sustain injuries and have poor vision, all of which compromise troop readiness. Tobacco use places a significant burden on the DoD, which spends more than \$1.6 billion each year on tobacco-related medical care, increased hospitalizations and lost days of work.

MILITARY LEADERS SUPPORT TOBACCO PREVENTION AND CESSATION

The military recognizes the negative impact of tobacco on military preparedness and troop health and has initiated a series of actions to curb tobacco use in the military. DoD and the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force have each set goals to become tobacco-free. In April 2016, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter approved actions “to ensure a comprehensive tobacco policy that assists with preventing initiation of tobacco use, helping those who want to quit using tobacco succeed, and decreasing exposure to secondhand smoke for all our people.”

Our military leaders understand the toll tobacco takes on our troops. Below are specific examples of military leaders supporting tobacco prevention and a tobacco sale age of 21:

- As part of the military’s tobacco prevention efforts, General Robert Magnus, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, has stated: *“Tobacco impairs reaction time and judgment. It stands in the way of a Marine’s No. 1 priority: to be in top physical and mental shape — combat ready.”*
- Major General Bret Daugherty, the Adjutant General for the state of Washington and Commander of the Washington National Guard, stated in testimony supporting raising the tobacco sale age: *“There is a laundry list of things that we as a country have decided are contrary to the interest of young people and public health, whether they are in the military or not. Decades ago, this very body saw the wisdom in raising the drinking age to 21. That policy change significantly reduced drunk driving deaths and contributed to the overall health of our public here in the state.”*
- Retired military leaders supported an Illinois bill to raise the tobacco sale age to 21. Major General (Ret) William Enyart, U.S. Army, Former Adjutant General of Illinois, 2007-2013; Major General (Ret) Randal Thomas, U.S. Army Former Adjutant General of Illinois, 2003-2007; Brigadier General (Ret) John “Jay” Sheedy, U.S. Air Force; Brigadier General (Ret) Avrum Mark Rabin, Illinois Air National Guard stated: *“Americans owe much to the young people who choose to serve in our military. But early addiction to a deadly drug is no reward. Their physical fitness and health should be paramount in policymaking decisions.”*