



It's Time to Raise the Tobacco Age to 21 in Texas

Tobacco is the No. 1 preventable cause of death in Texas and the United States. It kills 28,000 people in Texas each year and more than 480,000 Americans nationwide. Virtually all of them started using tobacco before age 21. We also face an alarming new challenge because of the youth e-cigarette epidemic. Youth e-cigarette use increased by 78 percent last year. Increasing the legal age for the sale of tobacco products – including e-cigarettes – to age 21 will help reduce smoking among young people and save lives.

PROBLEM

Tobacco companies admit that increasing the legal sale age for tobacco threatens their profits — a Philip Morris document stated, “Raising the legal minimum age for cigarette purchase to 21 could gut our key young adult market (17-20)...” No wonder they will do whatever they can to fight a tobacco sale age of 21. But here are the facts:

- **Tobacco Impacts Texas and Its Kids**

In Texas, 7.4 percent of high school students smoke – that’s 118,600 kids. Over 10 percent of high school students in the state use e-cigarettes. More than 65,000 Texas kids try smoking for the first time each year. And 10,400 young Texans become regular smokers every year. Nearly half a million (498,000) Texas kids alive now will ultimately die prematurely from smoking if current trends continue. Tobacco also costs Texas \$8.8 billion annually in health care bills.

- **The 18-21 Age Range is a Critical Time**

Tobacco companies target adolescents and young adults because they know that’s when most users become addicted to tobacco. About 95 percent of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21. Adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods of growth and development. Young people are more vulnerable to nicotine’s addictiveness and can become addicted more quickly than adults.

- **Tobacco Companies Spend Billions to Target and Addict Adolescents and Young Adults**

Tobacco companies spend \$9.5 billion per year to promote their deadly products, including over \$645 million in Texas. Much of that marketing directly influences kids and young adults.

SOLUTION

Sen. Joan Huffman and Rep. John Zerwas have introduced Senate Bill 338 and House Bill 749 — both of which include e-cigarettes — to protect kids from tobacco addiction and save lives by raising the tobacco age in the state to 21.

A statewide poll from December 2016 found that nearly 70 percent of voters favor a statewide law to raise the legal age for tobacco sales to 21. Support for the higher age spans the political spectrum, with two-thirds of Republicans and Independents in favor and 74 percent of Democrats. Even 62 percent of smokers in Texas support raising the tobacco age to 21.

RATIONALE

Increasing the tobacco age is about preventing tobacco use among young people, reducing smoking and saving lives. Raising the age 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.
- Keep tobacco (including e-cigarettes) out of high schools.
- Reduce tobacco use over the long term. For every three young people prevented from smoking by increasing the tobacco age, there will be one fewer smoking-caused death in the future.

A March 2015 report by the Institute of Medicine, one of the most prestigious scientific authorities in the world, **concluded that raising the tobacco age to 21 will have a meaningful positive impact on public health and save lives by:**

- Significantly reducing the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking;
- Reducing smoking-caused deaths; and
- Immediately improving the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking, as well as their children.

Specifically, the report predicts that raising the tobacco age to 21 will, over time, reduce the smoking rate by about 12 percent and smoking-related deaths by 10 percent — that's 223,000 fewer premature deaths and 4.2 million years of life saved.

The case for Tobacco 21 is strong. That's why so many health groups — over 65 organizations have signed on to the effort — believe in the effort, including: the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Texas Association of Family Physicians, Texas Medical Association and Texas Pediatric Society. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center is present as an educational resource only.

It's time to get the job done — raise the tobacco age to 21.