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CITY MARKS JULY 1 CHANGE IN SMOKING AGE TO PROTECT HEALTH OF CHICAGO YOUTH

Chicago Moves Tobacco Purchasing Age to 21 to Decrease Smoking Among Youth, Boost Health, Save Lives

July 1, 2016 will mark an early Independence Day for thousands of Chicago youth, due to changes in Chicago's tobacco laws that will allow them to face a future with less addiction, illness, and early death. Beginning on July 1, the minimum age to purchase tobacco products in Chicago will increase from 18 to age 21.

"Thanks to our ongoing efforts to shield our children from the harms of tobacco products, youth smoking in Chicago is on the decline, helping people to lead healthier lives and live longer" said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "We have consistently fought to protect our youth from being targeted by Big Tobacco so they can become Chicago's first tobacco-free generation."

Recognizing that 90 percent of smokers start the habit before the age of 21, and that the 18-20 age range is a critical time for new smokers, these reforms seek to protect young people who are more vulnerable to nicotine addiction, and are also targeted by the tobacco industry with marketing and products designed to lure youth.

"Because their brains are still developing, adolescents are especially vulnerable to addiction to tobacco and related products. By delaying the age that youth are exposed to these products until that critical development has taken place, we increase the chance they are able to resist addiction to tobacco," said Dr. Julie Morita, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH). "Keeping our youth away from tobacco until they are 21 is likely to extend their lives and boost the overall quality of their health."

According to the 2014 U.S. Census, there more than 118,000 residents ages 18 to 20 in the City of Chicago, thousands of which the city estimates will avoid the dangerous impacts that tobacco usage

and habit can cause, because of this new law. Chicago joins major cities such as New York, Boston, Cleveland, Kansas City and Evanston have already made the change to the purchase age.

A March 2015 report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) found that raising the tobacco sale age to 21 will have a substantial positive impact on public health and save lives over time. The report found that raising the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products will reduce the smoking rate by an estimated 12 percent and smoking-related deaths by 10 percent.

“These new laws will go far to protect our youth from tobacco use, the number one preventable cause of death in America,” said Nico Probst, Chicago government relations director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. “Mayor Emanuel, the Chicago Council and organizations that support these new laws understand that the health of our youth must always come first, and that taking important stands like this one will result in fewer lifelong smokers, more lives saved and a healthier Chicago.”

The City Council approved the Mayor’s most recent set of tobacco reforms in mid-March, and since then City agencies and aldermen have been working with licensed tobacco retailers to educate them about the new laws, including the requirement that all those who purchase tobacco products be at least 21 years of age.

“Once again, the city of Chicago has demonstrated their commitment to implementing tobacco control policy that protects all of our children, including ones from vulnerable communities, because we know that tobacco use is a primary driver of health inequity,” said Carol McGruder, Co-Chairperson of the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council. “The team effort led by Mayor Emanuel, the Aldermen, the Health Commissioner, the Department of Public Health, the Voluntaries, and the community is a case study in how to get the job done. Protecting our children from nicotine addiction helps us create, healthy and prosperous communities.”

Under Mayor Emanuel, Chicago has become a national leader in reducing tobacco use by enacting an innovative and effective array of programs and laws aimed at protecting youth from the addictive and dangerous habit of using tobacco and related products. Working with partners in the public health community, the City has helped reduce youth smoking to an all-time low. Following years of tobacco reduction efforts, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found in 2013 that only 10.7 percent of Chicago high school students were smokers—down from 13.6 percent in 2011, when Mayor Emanuel took office.

To read more about the health benefits of raising the tobacco purchase age to 21, please visit the [Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids](#) website.

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