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## Princeton Board of Health Votes to Prohibit Sale of Tobacco Products to People the Under Age of 21

MARCH 31, 2015 BY KRYSTAL KNAPP

The Princeton Board of Health unanimously approved the introduction of an ordinance last week that would ban the sale of tobacco and electronic cigarettes to people under the age of 21.

The board will hold a public hearing on the ordinance and vote on final adoption at its monthly meeting. The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 21, at 7:30 p.m. at 1 Monument Drive.

A new report released by the Institute of Medicine just this month found that raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco products to 21 would reduce smoking by 12 percent.

Public health benefits related to the projected decline in smoking from raising the age to 21 would take years to realize, but would be significant, according to the study. The Institute of Medicine estimates that there would be 249,000 fewer premature deaths, 45,000 fewer lung cancer deaths and 4.2 million fewer total years of life lost among those born between 2000 and 2019 if the minimum age to purchase cigarettes is raised to 21.

Non-smokers would also reap benefits. Between now and 2100, 286,000 fewer babies would be born prematurely and the effects of secondhand smoke on children would diminish, according to the study.

Princeton Board of Health Member George DiFerdinando Jr., who

helped develop the new ordinance over the last several months, said not only could premature deaths be prevented, but the quality of life could also be improved for many if smoking is reduced. “Former smokers struggle with the effects of smoking. They endure years of disability due to smoking, with many people developing emphysema or heart disease. Think of grandparents and parents,” he said. “Now think of the disability-free years they could enjoy.”

Currently, the state age requirement for purchasing tobacco products is 19. But municipalities can adopt more stringent ordinances. Englewood, Sayreville, and Teaneck have enacted similar laws raising the age requirement for purchasing tobacco products to 21.

The Princeton ordinance covers tobacco products and nicotine delivery products, including e-cigarettes, other types of smoking devices, liquids, powders, other forms of tobacco. Cigarette vending machines and self-service displays already banned in Princeton.

Princeton’s Department of Health would be charged with enforcing the ordinance. Officials would periodically perform undercover operations to see if merchants are following the law.

The penalty for selling or providing cigarettes to people under the age of 21 would be \$250 for the first violation, \$500 for the second violation, and \$1,000 or more for third and subsequent violations. The board of health could also suspend the retail food license of any person convicted of a violation. The suspension could last for up to three days.

Officials hope local business will be proactive and decide not to sell tobacco products and e-cigarettes. CVS voluntarily made the decision last year not to sell tobacco products. Target stopped

selling cigarettes in 1996.

“There are businesses in town who have, on their own like CVS and Target, decided to not sell tobacco products given their health mission,” DiFerdinando said. “We want to honor those businesses who see this as a health issue.”

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