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Princeton becomes 7th N.J. town prohibiting tobacco sales to customers under 21

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Customers under 21 years old will no longer be able to purchase tobacco products in Princeton.

The town's board of health unanimously adopted an ordinance Monday night **banning tobacco sales to a broader population**, making Princeton the seventh town in New Jersey to enact such a law.

"The real impact of increasing the tobacco age of sale is putting the legal purchase outside of the social circle of those who initiate," board member George DiFerdinando said. "It has minimal impact on those who are currently smoking."

Princeton joins Bogota, Englewood, Garfield, Highland Park, Sayreville and Teaneck in adopting an ordinance that requires customers to be a bit older than the state age requirement of 19 to purchase tobacco products, according to Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy.

The law, which Princeton's Department of Health will be in charge of enforcing, will go into effect within three weeks. There are about 20 locations in Princeton where cigarettes are sold and even more where tobacco products such as electronic cigarettes can be purchased. Retailers who violate the law will face a penalty of \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second and \$1,000 for the third and subsequent violations.

Eric Blomgren, associate director of government affairs for the New Jersey Gasoline Convenience Store Automotive Association, opposed the ordinance and said small businesses will be "needlessly hurt" by it.

"People under 21 are legally allowed to vote, to marry, to serve in the military, but this says they're not responsible enough to buy a cigar," Blomgren said. "They have access to a car. The end result is that these people are still going to smoke anywhere."

With a cigar sticking out of his top jacket pocket, Jorge Luis Armenteros, founder and president of A Little Taste of Cuba on Witherspoon Street, said he opposed the ordinance. But his luxury cigar shop will obey whatever laws on the books in Princeton because it is a special place to do business, he said.

Many Princeton University students have purchased products in his store to celebrate special accomplishments and events with their families, said Armenteros, noting this year marks his business' 20th anniversary in Princeton.

"We're not selling addictive products, per se," Armenteros said. "We're sharing special moments that people celebrate."

Princeton resident and pediatrician Stephanie Chorney said she was saddened to hear tobacco products used for celebratory purposes because of their addictive properties and threat to public health.

"It's really an eye-opening way of looking at things," she said.

In March 2013, Princeton became the first Mercer County town to **ban smoking on town property**. DiFerdinando

said the goal of the tobacco ordinance is to encourage other towns throughout the county to get on board, making it more difficult for customers under 21 to buy tobacco nearby.

"We're trying to lead by example," DiFerdinando said.

A report earlier this month by the Institute of Medicine projected 223,000 fewer premature deaths among those born between 2000 and 2019 if the age of tobacco sales was raised to 21.

Among adults who become daily smokers, about 90 percent smoke their first cigarette before age 19, the report said.

"This will save the lives of the youth who might initiate tobacco use," DiFerdinando said of the ordinance.

Most states currently set the tobacco purchase age at 18. New Jersey, Alabama, Alaska and Utah are the only ones that set a minimum age of 19 for tobacco sales.

A bill pending in the Legislature would make New Jersey the first state to increase the legal age to 21.

Editor's Note: The headline and story have been updated to reflect that Princeton is the seventh town in New Jersey to adopt a local ordinance prohibiting tobacco sales to those under 21. Highland Park and Garfield adopted similar ordinances earlier this month.

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