

Town Topics

Ordinance Prohibiting Sale of Tobacco Products To Get Public Hearing

At a meeting of Princeton's Board of Health on April 21, the public will have an opportunity to comment on an ordinance that would prohibit the sale of tobacco and nicotine delivery products to anyone under the age of 21. Introduced and unanimously approved by the Board last month, the ordinance is focused on cigarettes and e-cigarettes (electronic cigarettes), other smoking devices and forms of tobacco.

The ordinance would be enforced by the town's Department of Health. Any retailer caught selling the products to those under 21 would be charged \$250 for the first violation, \$500 for the second, and \$1,000 or more for subsequent violations.

"Princeton has always been at the forefront of prevention, especially when it comes to smoking and public health," said Jeffrey Grosser, the town's Health Officer. "This is one of those things that has so many benefits based upon how many people it will protect moving forward."

Mr. Grosser cited a recent study by the Institute of Medicine that said extending the age to 21 would result in 50,000 fewer deaths from lung cancer for anyone born between the years 2000 and 2019. Teens aged 17 to 19 are particularly vulnerable when it comes to getting addicted to tobacco and nicotine products.

"We've noticed that 19 is really not good enough," he said. "Eighty-five to 90 percent of people that become addicted are between 19 and 21. You do have a different sense of judgment when you hit 21. It's a little different from 19."

It would take several years to realize the public health benefits of raising the age, but they would be significant, according to the study. It estimates that between now and 2100, the effects of secondhand smoke on children would be lessened, and 286,000 fewer babies would be born prematurely.

E-cigarettes use a battery-powered vaporizer of nicotine and other liquids and flavorings (though some do not use nicotine). They were introduced in the United States in 2007. “The health effects of e-cigarettes are not clear, especially in terms of what the long-term ramifications are,” said Mr. Grosser. “People see it as a safe alternative, but we don’t necessarily know that it’s safe. And it can be a gateway into tobacco products.”

The state age requirement for buying tobacco products is currently 19. But individual towns can adopt their own ordinances. Princeton would be the fifth municipality in New Jersey to raise the minimum age to 21. Englewood was the first. New York City raised the age to 21 in 2013. A bill pending in the legislature would make New Jersey the first state to increase the legal age to 21.

Princeton was the first town in Mercer County to ban smoking on town property in March 2013. This includes municipal buildings, the community pools, parks, and recreation areas.

The Board of Health meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. in the East Conference Room of Monument Hall on Tuesday, April 21. The law, if adopted, would be put into effect 20 days later. “We’ve seen very good studies on the benefit of this to the community,” said Mr. Grosser. “The Board has been proactive on this, which is really good. I’m excited about it.”

Written by: Anne Levin

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