

Hawaii News Now

Gov. Ige signs bill raising legal smoking age in Hawaii to 21

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By Keoki Kerr

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) -

Hawaii will become the first state in the country to outlaw smoking for anyone under 21 next year after Gov. David Ige signed a bill raising the smoking age from 18 to 21 Friday.

The measure bans the sale or use of cigarettes and electronic smoking devices for anyone under age 21.

"Taking this step forward to prohibit anyone under the age of 21 of smoking, purchasing, possessing, is another step to reduce the impact that smoking has on our community," Ige said at a bill signing ceremony in his State Capitol office.

There will be no grandfather clause so an 18-year-old who can smoke legally now will not be able to do so legally as of January 1, when the law takes effect.

"Most people who begin smoking, about 99 percent, start before age 21, so this will help our young people delay starting tobacco use," said Lola Irvin, the administrator of the chronic disease prevention and health prevention division of the state Department of Health.

D'Angelo Beltrame, 19, an e-cigarette user who works at the E-Cig City store in Kalihi, lamented the approval of the new law.

"I won't even be able to vape in my own shop. So yeah, that's going to really affect me," Beltrame said.

When Hawaii News Now asked Beltrame's co-worker Reggie Dela Cruz to react to the e-cigs being included in the prohibition for smokers under 21, Dela Cruz said, "I think it's just ridiculous."

Dela Cruz said e-cigs are better for young people than cigarettes.

"For us to be the first state to do it, really sad. I've known a lot of former smokers switching over to vaping and they like it and it's a healthier choice for them now," Dela Cruz added.

Dela Cruz, who works in the E-Cig City shop along North King Street said a majority of the store's e-cigarette customers are between 18 and 21 years old, so he expects a huge drop in business when the law takes effect early next year.

State Health Department officials said they will continue contracting enforcement out to local police departments that send young people into stores to see if they can buy tobacco products even though they're under age.

"We already do retail sales monitoring and surveillance, so we will go back to the merchants and do retail education, also, there is a penalty for those who sell to minors and now it will be for those below age 21," Irvin said.

Stores caught selling tobacco to anyone under 21 will be fined \$500 for the first offense and each violation after that will see fines of anywhere from \$500 to \$2,000.

Starting next January when the under-21 ban takes effect, any minors caught by police using tobacco products are subject to a \$10 fine for the first offense and any subsequent violations will cost them \$50.

A proposal to raise the smoking age to 21 is working its way through the California legislature, so California is poised to be the second state to increase the smoking age as high as Hawaii.

There are four states that have already raised the smoking age to 19: Alabama, Alaska, New Jersey and Utah.

Ige signed a second bill Friday that makes state beach parks and beaches smoke-free, another first-in-the-nation prohibition. Smoking is already banned at all city and county parks across the state except in Kauai County. Using cigarettes and any tobacco products including e-cigarettes will be against the law in state parks starting July 1.

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