N.J., states should raise e-cigarette age to 21, nation's largest doctor group says

By **Susan K. Livio | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**
Email the author | **Follow on Twitter**
on June 10, 2015 at 7:30 AM, updated June 10, 2015 at 8:11 AM

TRENTON — With the popularity of electronic cigarettes soaring among teenagers, the nation's largest physician association Tuesday urged state lawmakers across the country to prohibit anyone under age 21 from buying the nicotine and water vapor devices.

The AMA's newest policy, announced from its annual meeting in Chicago, expands on its efforts "to help keep all tobacco products, including electronic cigarettes, out of the hands of young people, by urging laws to deter the sale of electronic cigarettes to anyone under the age of 21," said the association's President Robert M. Wah. "Improving the health of the nation is the AMA's top priority and we will continue to advocate for policies that help reduce the burden of preventable diseases like cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, both of which can be linked to smoking."

In New Jersey, people under the age of 19 are prohibited from buying tobacco products and electronic cigarettes. A bill that would raise the age to 21 **passed the Senate a year ago,** but it has stalled in the Assembly. The nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services studied the financial impact of the bill and estimated the state would lose about $19 million in revenue the first year it took effect.

The Garden State was the first state to ban "vaping" in public in 2010. Gov. Chris Christine governor **proposed taxing e-cigarettes like tobacco products last year** but abandoned the idea after convenience store owners protested.

Englewood, Teaneck, Bogota, Garfield, Highland Park, Sayreville, Princeton and East Rutherford have passed ordinances outlawing the sale of e-cigarettes to people under 21 — two years higher than state law, according to the Summit-based anti-smoking group Global Advisers Smoke-free Policy, or GASP.

The American Medical Association also called upon elected officials to require liquid nicotine cartridges to be packaged in child-proof containers.

"We also urge the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to act now to implement its proposed rule to effectively regulate electronic cigarettes," he added.

E-cigarette use among middle and high school students tripled from 2013 to 2014, **according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2014 National Youth Tobacco Survey.** In 2014, 2 million high school students reported using e-cigarettes compared to 660,000 in 2013, the CDC said. Among middle school students, e-cigarette rose from 120,000 to 450,000 students.

E-cigarettes do not produce the carcinogens associated with burning tobacco, but the long-term effects are unknown. E-cigarette cartridges contain nicotine, making them just as addictive as tobacco products.

Some defend e-cigarettes because **they have enabled smokers quit tobacco.**
"In the case of kids, e-cigarettes are harmful all by themselves because of the effects of nicotine on kids' brains," CDC Director Tom Frieden said when he announced the statistics in April. "The fact that kids in increasing numbers are using a product that's harmful to their brains is alarming."

GASP President and former state Health Commissioner Fred Jacobs said raising the legal age to buy e-cigarettes is important because if young people don't start smoking by age 21, they are likely to remain non-smokers for life.

Although the long-term side effects of e-cigarettes are not understood, Jacobs said they are a serious public health threat to young people who will get hooked on the nicotine, and use them as a "gateway" to tobacco products.

Not treating e-cigarettes like tobacco "sends the wrong message that smoking is acceptable in society," Jacobs said.

*Susan K. Livio may be reached at **slivio@njadvancemedia.com**. Follow her on Twitter **@SusanKLivio**. Find **NJ.com Politics on Facebook.***

http://www.nj.com/healthfit/index.ssf/2015/06/nj_states_should_raise_e-cigarette_age_to_21_natio.html