

No tobacco purchases until age 21? Healdsburg passes ban

By Kurtis Alexander and Kale Williams

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Healdsburg will be the first municipality in California to ban tobacco sales to anyone younger than 21.

Healdsburg's Dry Creek Road is home to numerous tasting rooms with outdoor seating for visitors to sip and snack on packed lunches. (Everett Ridge Winery is pictured here.)

The Wine Country city of Healdsburg, known for enticing tourists with its bounty of fresh food and drink, now has another distinction: It's the first place in California to ban tobacco sales to anyone younger than 21.

The City Council voted Monday night, 4-1, to raise the legal age for buying cigarettes, chew and other tobacco products from 18, putting it at the same threshold for purchasing booze.

The restriction, which needs a second council vote before taking effect, seeks to bolster the fit and fertile character of the Sonoma County destination.

"We are a community that prides itself on a healthier lifestyle in general," said Healdsburg City Manager [Marjie Pettus](#). "There's a real focus on healthy eating here, with farm-to-table initiatives ... and this (new tobacco ordinance) ties into that whole lifestyle that people really subscribe to."

Pettus echoed what many health experts have been saying for years — that if tobacco stays out of the hands of young people, they have less chance of using it later in life, thus lowering their risk of cancer and other smoking-related diseases.

According to the surgeon general's office, nearly 9 in 10 smokers pick up the habit before age 18, and nearly everyone who puffs begins before 26. Recent studies in England, where the tobacco-purchase age was raised from 16 to 18 in 2007, found the move correlated with overall declines in smoking.

But while other cities in California have considered raising the tobacco-buying age — and Sacramento legislators debated it a decade ago — the efforts have fallen short.

[Vanessa Marvin](#), advocacy director for the [American Lung Association](#) in California, which supports the increase, said more places might be willing to follow Healdsburg's lead, especially after New York in May became the first big city nationally to raise the age to 21 for buying tobacco products.

"The profile of the New York ordinance was prominent," Marvin said. "I imagine that there will be more interest among cities in California now."

In addition to the new age rule for tobacco sales, the Healdsburg legislation requires tobacco retailers to obtain a new annual license from the city, expected to cost about \$450, with proceeds helping enforce local tobacco laws.

Healdsburg, a city of just under 12,000 people, already prohibits smoking in parks and within 20 feet of businesses. Cigar shops, as well as hookah and vapor lounges, are also banned.

Monday's ordinance wasn't without critics.

"The four miles of Healdsburg has no business doing what no other city in California has done ... not even San Francisco," said Councilman [Gary Plass](#), the lone dissenting vote Monday night.

While Plass said he's no fan of cigarettes — he lost his father to esophageal cancer after a lifetime of smoking — he said he doesn't think local government should preempt state and federal laws.

He and others worry that local retailers will be put at a disadvantage by the citywide restriction, and that those younger than 21 who want to smoke will be able to easily skirt the law.

"They can go a mile to the south or a mile to the north or a mile to the west and buy their cigarettes there," he said.

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