

# Saugus tobacco sales purchase age to become 21 in January

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SAUGUS

*Starting in January customers will have to be 21 in order to purchase tobacco at Saugus businesses.*

*The Board of Health voted unanimously to amend its regulations to raise the legal age to buy tobacco products in town to 21. The new minimum age will take effect Jan. 1.*

*Saugus will join the 34 Massachusetts cities and towns that have increased the minimum age to 21 for tobacco sales, including neighboring communities Melrose, Malden and Wakefield.*

*During last week's public hearing, Massachusetts Municipal Association Tobacco Control Director DJ Wilson told the Board of Health that raising the age aims to make it more difficult for younger teens to gain access to tobacco.*

*The hope is that youths will be more mature before being exposed to cigarettes by their peers and just say no, Wilson said.*

*"It gets rid of a social source in high schools," Wilson said.*

*Joyce Redford, who is the program director for the North Shore/Cape Ann Tobacco Alcohol Policy Program, approached the Board of Health to advocate increasing the tobacco purchase minimum age to 21.*

*The 34 communities that went with the higher age represent 13.2 percent of the state's population, according to the Municipal Tobacco Control Technical Assistance Program. New York City implemented a minimum age of 21 to purchase tobacco this past May.*

*Eric Prince, who owns the Sunoco station on Route 1, rose to speak against increasing the minimum age from 18 to 21.*

*Prince said he believes in the cause of trying to get tobacco out of the hands of children. However, he argued that the change should be implemented statewide to create a level playing*

field.

*A concern is that customers will just drive to a business in other towns where the minimum age to buy tobacco is 18, Prince said. He added that the loss is further exacerbated because these customers purchase gas and other products.*

*Board of Health Chairman Joe Vinard said he understands Prince's position, but stressed that change has to start somewhere and that his board's job is to promote public health.*

*Diane Knight, the director of the Northeast Tobacco Free Community Partnership, said moving to 21 is key to help stop younger people from having access to lethal tobacco products.*

*Bayview Road resident Rick Fail expressed concern that residents as young as 18 can fight for their country and potentially die, yet won't be able to buy cigarettes or alcohol in Saugus.*

*"We're building another layer of protection so kids who had access to (tobacco) hopefully won't in the future," Vinard responded.*

*Following the vote, Wilson commended the Board of Health for being proactive in protecting public health and aligning the minimum tobacco sales purchase age with alcohol.*

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