

## Marty Walsh seeking to increase tobacco minimum age to 21

Mayor Martin J. Walsh yesterday proposed raising the minimum age at which people can buy tobacco or nicotine products — including e-cigarettes — from 18 to 21.

“We want to cut down on young people smoking tobacco,” Walsh said. “Studies show that if you don’t start smoking by the age of 21, there’s a good chance you’re not going to.”

Due in part to tobacco-control measures to address youth smoking, the rate of cigarette use among Boston high school students has fallen from 15.3 percent in 2005 to 7.9 percent in 2013, according to the mayor’s office.

Recognizing this shift, the tobacco industry has ramped up efforts to attract young smokers through pricing, marketing and flavoring, critics say. Research shows that instead of smoking cigarettes, Boston youngsters are turning to other tobacco products, including candy-, fruit- and other sweet-flavored cigars, as well as e-cigarettes.

The use of inexpensive cigars and cigarillos among Boston youngsters, for example, nearly doubled from 11 percent in 2010 to 20 percent in 2013, Walsh’s office said.

“Prohibiting tobacco sales to those under 21 and restricting availability of flavored tobacco products sends a clear message to all community members that our kids’ health is not for sale,” said Tami Gouveia, executive director of Tobacco Free Mass.

Jeff Leonard, a spokesman for the National Association of Convenience Stores, said raising the minimum age to 21 will hurt convenience stores, which sell more than 80 percent of cigarettes sold in the U.S.

“We sell legal products responsibly,” Leonard said. “But if you want to smoke, you’ll find these products either by going to another city or state, or by turning to the black market — and they don’t care about age verification.”

A public hearing on the changes is scheduled for Dec. 3, and written comments can be submitted until Dec. 9. The Board of Health is expected to vote on Dec. 17. If approved, the changes will become effective 60 days later.