

# Oregon becomes fifth state to increase tobacco age to 21

---

 [www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/08/oregon\\_becomes\\_third\\_state\\_to.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/08/oregon_becomes_third_state_to.html)

By Gordon R. Friedman [gfriedman@oregonian.com](mailto:gfriedman@oregonian.com) The Oregonian/OregonLive

*Correction appended.*

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signed [legislation](#) Wednesday to increase the state's tobacco possession age to 21, a major victory for health advocates and a blow for Big Tobacco.

The age increase will take effect Jan. 1 and affect sale of traditional tobacco products along with vapes. The law makes Oregon one of five states, along with California, Hawaii, Maine and New Jersey, to raise the tobacco age to 21.

Oregon's new law aims to crack down on tobacco vendors who sell to the underaged, rather than punish the buyers. Fines for store clerks and managers who sell tobacco products to minors start at \$50 and \$250, but can reach \$500 and \$1000 after multiple offenses.

Tobacco-related disease is the number one cause of preventable death in Oregon, according to the Oregon Health Authority, and causes more than [7,000 deaths](#) a year in the state. Lawmakers who pushed the age-increase bill said addiction to tobacco usually starts young, and increasing the purchasing age may stave-off addiction and future disease.

The national association representing tobacco retailers was the only major organization to testify against the age-raising bill. Oregon lobbyists hired to represent tobacco producers did not testify on the bill.

Oregon was slated to become the third state to increase its tobacco age to 21, but New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie signed age-increasing legislation July 21 and Maine lawmakers overrode a veto of such legislation by Gov. Paul LePage on August 2.

Oregon will be the fourth state where a tobacco possession age of 21 takes effect, since the legislation from New Jersey takes effect in November and Maine's takes effect in late 2018.

-- Gordon R. Friedman

[GFriedman@Oregonian.com](mailto:GFriedman@Oregonian.com)

503-221-8209; [@GordonRFriedman](https://twitter.com/GordonRFriedman)

*Correction: This article has been updated to reflect that Oregon was the fifth, not the third, state to increase its tobacco age to 21.*