

New Jersey smoking age could be raised to 21

By Reid Wilson July 1

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

New Jersey could become the only state in the country to prevent anyone under the age of 21 from purchasing tobacco products under a measure passed Monday by the state Senate.

The bill, backed by a [super majority of senators](#), would levy a \$500 fine against retailers who sell tobacco products or electronic cigarettes to those under 21. A second offense would carry a \$1,000 fine.

Retail trade groups testified against the measure, which puts the onus on their members to check identifications, rather than on the minors who attempt to purchase cigarettes.

The Garden State already is one of the states with the highest smoking age in the country, 19. Three other states — Utah, Alaska and Alabama — also prohibit sales to anyone under 19.

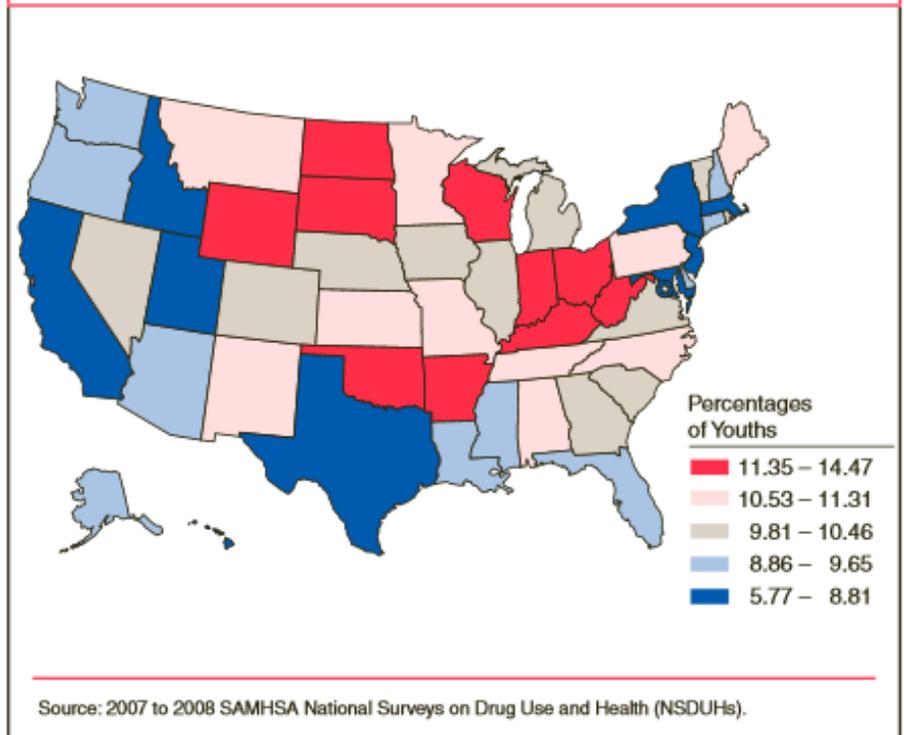
Two localities, New York City and Hawaii County, Hawaii, have prohibited [anyone under 21](#) from purchasing tobacco products. Now, states are following suit. [Utah](#) and Colorado are also debating measures that would raise the smoking age to 21. Both states [advanced their own bans](#) in February.

Both measures would take effect in several years, effectively grandfathering in anyone over 18 who already smokes. The Utah bill would take effect in 2016, while the Colorado measure would be implemented in 2017.

Health officials believe raising the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products can substantially cut down on smoking rates. Researchers say 90 percent of regular smokers in the United States have their first cigarettes before they turn 18, and 90 percent of cigarettes obtained by underage smokers are purchased by those between 18 and 20 years old.

The New Jersey ban now heads to the Assembly. Gov. Chris Christie (R) has not said whether he would sign or veto the legislation.

Figure 1. Percentages of Past Month Cigarette Use among Youths Aged 12 to 17, by State: 2007 and 2008



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