

Newburyport latest Massachusetts community to raise tobacco-buying age

Top Headlines

Starting July 1, only individuals 19 and older will be allowed to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products in Newburyport, a Massachusetts city near the New Hampshire border. *(THE REPUBLICAN FILE)*

By
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BOSTON —
Newburyport
recently
joined nearly
two dozen
other
communities
in



Massachusetts that have raised the legal age limit to purchase tobacco products.

Starting July 1, only individuals 19 and older will be allowed to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products in the Massachusetts city near the New Hampshire border.

The board of health voted March 20 to increase the purchase age, in an effort to keep tobacco out of the hands of high school students, according to Robert Bracey, Newburyport director of public health.

Mayor Donna Holaday, who appoints board of health members, opposed the move.

Until 2012, Needham was the only community in the U.S. that prohibited sales to anyone under 21 – a change the town made in 2005. Since then, several Massachusetts communities have raised the legal age to 19 or 21, according to DJ Wilson, tobacco control director at the Massachusetts Municipal Association.

Most states, including Massachusetts, allow 18-year-olds to buy tobacco products. Alaska, Alabama, Utah and New

Jersey are the exceptions, all of which have pushed the legal age to 19.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed legislation last year that raises the tobacco purchasing age from 18 to 21. It takes effect this spring. Newton is also considering a change.

Wilson said although there is scant data to show that raising the age limit to buy tobacco will reduce the number of smokers, it is a good theory.

"It worked in alcohol. It should work to the public health advantage," he said Thursday.

Retailers fear the restrictions will hurt sales of other products, particularly in communities that border other states.

"All these efforts are well-intended but they don't really understand that it is not really going to have an effect on how many people smoke. It is just going to affect where your local residents spend their money," said Jon Hurst, president of the Retailers Association of Massachusetts.

Drug store giant CVS Caremark announced in February it will stop selling cigarettes and other tobacco products at its stores throughout the country starting this fall. The Rhode Island-based pharmacy is the first national chain to ban the products from its stores.

Along with Needham, communities that have raised the legal purchasing age to 21 include Sharon, Arlington, Canton, Ashland, Dedham, Dover, Wellesley, Scituate, Hudson, Norwood, Winchester, Wakefield and Reading. In addition to Newburyport, communities that raised it to 19 are: Brookline, Belmont, Watertown, Westwood, Walpole, and Sudbury, according to the MMA.
