

Raise the smoking age to 21

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What is the age of adulthood and the attainment of personal responsibility that that age assumes? It depends. For driving a car, it's 16. For joining the military, it's 17 with parental consent, 18 without it. For voting, it's 18, at least for general elections. For purchasing alcohol, it's 21. For buying cigarettes or other tobacco products, 18.

Does this inconsistency make sense? Frankly, yes. Just because you are deemed responsible enough to drive at 16 doesn't mean you're mature and responsible enough to make your own decision to join the military at that age, or to vote. And just because you're old enough to join the military at 18 doesn't mean you should be able to buy alcohol at that age.

Why? For one thing, the biggest thing, because of the horrendous societal and public health problems stemming from alcohol and its overconsumption.

The same could be said, of course, for smoking cigarettes. Cancer, heart disease, lung disease, strokes, diabetes and other tobacco-related illnesses kill more than 480,000 Americans a year. And the overwhelming number of tobacco addicts start smoking before the age of 21.

The California Senate passed legislation this week to raise the minimum age for buying or smoking tobacco from 18 to 21. It now goes to the Assembly.

We urge its enactment into law. It will block some young people from picking up the habit. It will save lives.