

Raise the legal tobacco age limit to 21

By Ashley Bruner

Contributing columnist

It's no secret that [tobacco](#) is a killer.

Most of us are old enough and wise enough to know that.

That is why [tobacco companies](#) depend on marketing to youth in order to find consumers of their products.

According to the American Lung Association, 86 percent of [smokers](#) begin using tobacco before the age of 21.

By raising the legal age limit for purchase and consumption of tobacco products to 21, the level of access to tobacco by this demographic could be greatly reduced. Thousands of people could be spared a lifetime of poor health and premature death due to [tobacco use](#) and nicotine addiction.

Emerging research suggests that raising the legal tobacco age to 21 will not only reduce access of those ages 18-21 to tobacco products, but also access of minors who would otherwise obtain tobacco products from 18-21 year olds. This is according to the Monitoring the Future survey, conducted in 2014, which found that minor children are purchasing tobacco indirectly, from peers and classmates ages 18-19.

Reducing access to tobacco for these age groups would undoubtedly save thousands of lives, and reduce the number of individuals who initiate tobacco use overall. In addition, maternal smoking and birth outcomes would be immediately and profoundly affected. The Institute of medicine projects that with a nationwide increase of the legal age limit for tobacco products over time an estimated 438,000 fewer babies would be born with low birth weight, there would be 286,000 fewer preterm births, and 4,000 fewer deaths from sudden infant death syndrome.

The facts are out there for your consideration. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the [American Lung Association](#), and the American Cancer Society — all of these reputable organizations have information on this topic readily available on their websites; I invite you to do your own research.

You will find that raising the legal age limit for tobacco products to 21 will save lives, improve the health of our children, and our country.

Ashley Bruner is a Troy resident and junior at Wright State in the Public Health Education program.