

EDITORIAL: Minimum age for smoking, e-cigs should be raised to 21

By Enterprise editorial staff

When the national drinking age was raised from 18 to 21, many people said the change would never work - and was unfair too. They pointed out that youths could join the army, get married or sign a contract at 18. They said teenagers had always drunk alcohol and still would.

Yet time has borne out the wisdom of that shift. Drunk driving deaths among those 18-21 noticeably decreased. Legal sales of alcohol to underage youths have largely ended even if kids can still get booze illegally. Getting "carded" in a bar or restaurant is common and widely accepted.

It's time for a similar change for tobacco and e-cigarettes, as recommend by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) this week.

Virtually all smokers start when they're young. If we can crimp the front end of that pipeline, fewer people will pick up this habit - and die from it.

Smoking is an absolutely deadly practice. It's unlike drinking, where you can enjoy a glass of wine or beer for simple refreshment without intending to get drunk. Smoking has no redeeming qualities and is a proven killer.

The issue of e-cigarettes is a little trickier, because they apparently don't cause lung cancer or heart disease like tobacco cigarettes. But scientists still don't know the long-term effects of e-cigs, and the bottom line is that users are still introducing a variety of chemicals into their bodies.

The use of e-cigs or "vaping" is also getting increasingly popular among some young people as the hip new fad. Not only is that problematic on its own, it could move these same users to tobacco cigarettes and their known dangers.

Major changes like this may appear to be unrealistic. But people can be encouraged to wear seat belts or stop smoking in elevators even though those proposals initially seemed outrageous to some. It's time to start that process for today's youth so more of them can become tomorrow's senior citizens.

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