

## Raise the Age to 21 - The Missourian: Editorials

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The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is urging policymakers to raise the minimum age people could buy nicotine products, that includes cigarettes and e-cigarettes, to 21.

More than half of current smokers report having started smoking before they were 18, and the number of teens who tried e-cigarettes and hookahs tripled in one year. The AAP says raising the legal age to buy tobacco could dramatically reduce future smokers.

The group also is asking for better regulation of e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems. More youths used e-cigs, which can come in a wide variety of flavors such as grape, cotton candy and gummy bear, than any other tobacco product in 2014, according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

While the number of kids trying tobacco for the first time is declining, there are still new smokers every year so raising the legal age could go a long way in curbing those numbers even further which benefits all of us.

Raising the age would reduce access to teenagers, which is when most smokers become addicted, experts say.

Currently, only Hawaii and about 90 cities and communities in other states have a law requiring a minimum age of 21 to purchase tobacco products. In Kansas City, civic leaders last week called for a raise in the legal age to buy tobacco. Columbia was the first city in Missouri to raise the age.

Statewide legislation is being considered in several states, including California.

Teens aren't thinking about the long-term health consequences when they begin experimenting with tobacco. Nicotine is addictive and adolescents and young adults are more susceptible to its effects because their brains are still developing. Delaying the age when young people can first experiment can reduce the risk that they will become addicted.

Tobacco companies intentionally market to kids and young adults, so increasing the age to 21 will help counter those efforts. It also will help keep tobacco out of high schools.

There is no safe way to use tobacco, the AAP president says. About 700 kids under the age of 18 become regular smokers every day, and one in three will eventually die as a result.

We should be doing everything we can to prevent young people from smoking and save lives. The tougher the laws to keep it out of the hands of youth the better.

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