

Smoke free new year for under 21s in Attleboro

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ATTLEBORO — A [ban](#) on the sale of tobacco and nicotine products to anyone under the age of 21 will become law in Attleboro on Jan. 1.

However, health officials decided not to completely ban the sale of flavored tobacco and nicotine products, to the relief of [store owners](#) who argued at a public hearing last week that such a ban would cripple or kill their businesses.

Health Officer Dr. Christopher Quinn said last week that flavored tobacco and nicotine products can be sold in stores catering only to people 21 and older, giving a reprieve to the merchants.

But they'll be on a short leash.

If any of the stores are caught selling to anyone under the age of 21 two times within a year their licenses will be revoked and they'll be out of business, Quinn said.

"Don't get caught," he warned shop owners at meeting on Thursday. "If you can't take on this responsibility, don't stay in Attleboro. Go to Swansea."

Quinn said the aim is simple.

"My goal is to keep these things out of the hands of kids and prevent another generation of addicts," he said.

Quinn also granted a second exemption to the new law which will allow customers to purchase a small amount of a flavored nicotine and try it out in the store to determine if they want to buy a larger quantity.

Free samples are banned and it will be illegal for all stores that cater to all ages to sell any flavored tobacco or nicotine products.

No new licenses for 21 and older shops will be issued by the city after Jan. 1, Quinn said.

As the city's health officer, Quinn can impose the regulations without a hearing or consulting with businesses if he deems the public health is at risk.

However he did both. The hearing on Oct. 29 was attended by at least 50 people, the majority of whom were against the ban.

Quinn and Health Agent Alan Perry believe nicotine delivery devices, such as the e-cigarettes that have gained popularity with people trying to quit and with young people who were not prohibited from buying them, will encourage older people to keep or start smoking and younger people to start smoking or create a harmful nicotine addiction.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has issued a warning that nicotine may be damaging to brain development in young people.

The new law also bans the use of e-cigarettes anywhere cigarette smoking is banned.

Without the ban, e-cigarettes would be legal in offices, restaurants, schools and elsewhere.

Shop owners were relieved by the decision.

“It sounds good to me,” said Lou Rebello of Goodfella Vapor on Newport Avenue.

Jay Mollman of Jay’s Vapor Den on Washington Street said selling to teens was never his goal.

“I have no problem not selling to kids, that’s the last thing I want to do,” he said.

Shop owners argued that nicotine consumption through e-cigarettes helps people stay off cigarettes and other dangerous tobacco products.

They also said nicotine products are a safer option for young people and can keep them from trying cigarettes.

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