

Illinois should raise the legal age for tobacco products

Congratulations to the city of Cleveland on recently raising the legal age for tobacco products to 21!

To date, more than 100 communities in nine states (including Evanston — the only Illinois city on the list so far) have taken this important step toward improving the health of their residents.

Plenty of folks are upset about this trend, and I'm sympathetic to some of their arguments. But as a physician, when I think about what's going to help my patients in the long run, taking steps to keep young people from forming this deadly habit is high on the list.

The Illinois State Medical Society has long supported raising the legal age for tobacco products, and recently updated its position to include e-cigarettes, which may not be any safer than old-fashioned cigarettes. While this will not stop young people from using tobacco products altogether, it is a reasonable step that could lengthen and improve the lives of countless people — particularly if adopted on a wider scale.

Illinois physicians encourage city councils, county boards and the Legislature in our state to follow the lead of Cleveland, New York City, Kansas City, Hawaii County and many other places that have the courage to fight back against the tobacco lobby and do what is right for their citizens.

Dr. Scott A. Cooper • Chicago

President, Illinois State Medical Society