

# Most Kentuckians Support Raising Age To Buy Tobacco, Poll Says

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The majority of Kentucky adults favor raising the legal age to buy tobacco products, according to a poll released Monday morning.

The Kentucky Health Issues Poll, by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky and Interact for Health, shows 60 percent of Kentucky adults support raising the age to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21.

Susan Zepeda, president and CEO of the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, said raising the age would serve as a deterrent for young people starting to use tobacco products.

“If the shopkeepers are doing their jobs, it would mean that the only way a younger person could get cigarettes would be if an older person would either give them to them or buy them for them,” she said.

Kentucky’s smoking rate is 30.2 percent, the highest in the U.S., according to the most recent Gallup-Healthways report.

Raising the age limit to 21 also appears to be politically agreeable. The poll shows 60 percent of Republicans and Democrats support raising the age, followed by 55 percent of independents.

The poll also looked at Kentuckians’ views on increasing the excise tax associated with the sale of cigarettes. Currently, Kentucky has a 60-cent tax on cigarettes, according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.

The poll asked Kentuckians’ views on raising the tax to \$1 per pack; half of respondents opposed such a move. The tax increase was favored by 45 percent.

Zepeda said increasing the price would also be a deterrent. She said the hope that young people will think twice before beginning smoking or use the increased costs as impetus to reduce their smoking or stop smoking altogether.

“Those higher taxes become a deterrent to young people because young adults are generally quite price-sensitive, and so an increase in the tax increases the overall price of a pack of cigarettes,” Zepeda said.

Current smokers oppose an excise tax more than any other group at 85 percent, according to the poll. Among those who have never smoked, 59 percent favor a cigarette tax increase. The majority of former smokers — 51 percent — also favor the tax.

Across political parties, 47 percent of Republicans, 45 percent of Democrats and 42 percent of independents favor increasing the cigarette excise tax to \$1 per pack.

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