

# The Enterprise

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## Tobacco purchase age raised to 21 in Stoughton

Effective in early July, people will have to be at least 21 years old to purchase tobacco products in Stoughton.

STOUGHTON – Teenagers soon won't be able to walk into convenience stores and buy cigarettes and other tobacco products in town.

The Board of Health unanimously voted, 4-0, to raise the legal tobacco purchase age from 18 to 21 years old.

Back in January, Stoughton residents began signing a petition for the health board to raise the purchase age. The Board of Health began discussing a possible change as far back as mid-January.

The final public hearing on the proposed change in regulations was held last Thursday.

Four people spoke in favor of the the board adopting the change – no one was opposed at the meeting.

"It's been surprisingly easy to enforce," said D.J. Wilson, the tobacco control director and public health liaison for the Massachusetts Municipal Association. "We've had good compliance with stores."

There are 118 cities and towns who have adopted Tobacco 21, the initiative led by Dr. Lester Hartman, a pediatrician at Westwood-Mansfield Pediatric Associates, to raise the minimum tobacco purchase age.

Hartman was in attendance at the hearing last Thursday and asked the Board of Health to adopt the regulations.

"Every town that puts their voice in on this now means it's more likely to pass across the state," Hartman said. "Then the convenience stores that want a level playing field will have it."

Proponents of raising the purchase age say research shows teenagers are less likely to become addicted to tobacco if they can't legally buy it at the age of 18.

"Any child or any teen that really starts smoking at a young age, they become faster addicted to the nicotine, to the tobacco," said Larissa Swenson of Bay State Community Services. "It actually makes it harder for them to quit if they start smoking earlier on in life. They are actually more prone to other psychological issues and they're more prone to other addictions later on in life."

Todd Brown, a clinical instructor from Stoughton, who is also a member of Organizing Against Substances in Stoughton, said a survey of Stoughton High School students last year revealed at least seven percent of students had smoked cigarettes in the last month.

"We know, in Stoughton, cigarette use among youth is on the decline. We would like to keep it that way," said Brown, the vice chair of Northeastern University's Department of Pharmacy Practice "We know that most smokers begin using tobacco as adolescents."

The hearing lasted about 15 minutes before the Board of Health adopted the change.

"In the formative meetings, it's come to light that it's a health hazard for sure and I think it would curtail our youth from smoking in town," said Stephanie Milligan, a member of the Board of Health.

The change will go into effect around July 9, after it is advertised in the newspaper.



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Person smoking a cigarette.

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