

Cortland County Becomes the Fifth Locality in NYS To Pass T21

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Cortland County has become the fifth locality in New York State, proceeding Suffolk, Chautauqua, and Albany Counties, as well as New York City, to pass a law to raise the purchase age for tobacco to 21 (T21). The law goes into effect on October 1, 2016.

Raising the minimum age for tobacco sales to 21 will reduce the number of kids who start smoking. That's a fact.

More than 90% of adult smokers start before the age of 18. The Institute of Medicine estimates that raising the legal purchase age nationally would reduce youth smoking initiation by 25% and the overall smoking rate by 12% in the first five year, an astounding achievement for such a simple public health measure.

Whether we like to believe it or not, our behavior is highly influenced by our environment. Education alone doesn't cut it. The overwhelming majority of people know that tobacco and illicit drug use is harmful. Same goes for

unhealthy eating or getting behind the wheel after having too many alcoholic drinks. Yet, it happens too often. Complementary approaches are vital if we truly care about preventing needless suffering, illness and death.

Tobacco is a very unique product. There is no safe level of tobacco consumption. It's the only legally available product that kills up to one half of its users when consumed as recommended by its manufacturer. Tobacco companies have been caught purposefully engineering their products to make tobacco smoke smoother, less harsh and more appealing to new users, especially kids, and to create and sustain addiction to nicotine.

And introducing an addictive substance, such as nicotine, into a still-developing brain increases the likelihood of long-term addiction. Addiction is not a personal choice.

When new public health initiatives are proposed, they often create these controversies (such as being intrusive & impacting personal choice). But after the attention dies down, the benefits to public health and safety that these policies produced, become normal and expected. Few people now question government's role in preventing sales of contaminated food, water, and medications; reducing alcohol-impaired driving; requiring seatbelts, helmets and car seats, etc.

Law and public opinion recognize protection of health and safety as a core government function. It is important to reinvigorate enthusiasm for sensible policies, such as T21, that provide broad social benefits.

Tobacco use not only affects the user. It impacts everyone. Besides exposure to someone else's toxic smoke, or watching a loved one struggle to breathe, the healthcare costs associated with treating those with tobacco-related illnesses hits everyone's wallets: Medicaid and Medicare taxpayer contributions, along with premiums for health insurance.

Tobacco 21 laws are an important tool within the multi-pronged approach to successfully compete against the addictive power of nicotine and the tobacco industry's predatory and aggressive marketing tactics.