

Holding on to the habit

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ITEM PHOTO BY OWEN O'ROURKE

Jelena Kostadinovic said starting to smoke is one of her biggest regrets.

BY GAYLA CAWLEY

The health risks of smoking are well-known, but that hasn't stopped some **North Shore** residents from lighting up.

Nicole Daddario, a student at **North Shore Community College**, was smoking outside the school on Tuesday. The 30-year-old **Revere** resident said she started because her friends did it.

"My city, all the kids smoked, so you just smoked," she said.

Despite the risks of lung disease, emphysema, chronic bronchitis and cancer, more than 3,200 people under 18 smoke their first cigarette every day, nine out of 10 smokers start before the age of 18, and 98 percent start smoking by age 26, according to the **Center for Disease Control and Prevention**.

To keep teens from starting the nasty and dangerous habit, more than 100 **Massachusetts** cities and towns have raised the minimum age to purchase tobacco to 21, up from 18. **Peabody**, **Swampscott** and **Marblehead** adopted the new rules this year.

Sharon Cameron, Peabody's health and human services director, said delaying the age of when people begin to smoke makes it less likely that they will get hooked.

"Once it is established as a habit, it's harder to break," she said.

The city's new higher age requirement stemmed from an **Institute of Medicine** article titled "**Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products**." The study found that increasing the minimum age would likely prevent or delay tobacco use by young adults. The age group most affected would be those between 15 and 17 years old, the survey said.

Cameron said a big part of the **Tobacco 21** initiative, a movement to increase the legal age nationwide, is to keep cigarettes out of the hands of high schoolers. She said many students report that they obtain tobacco products through friends or family.

"Changing the sales age from 18 to 21 helps stop the practice of 18-year-old high schoolers who can legally purchase and then share it with classmates," she said.

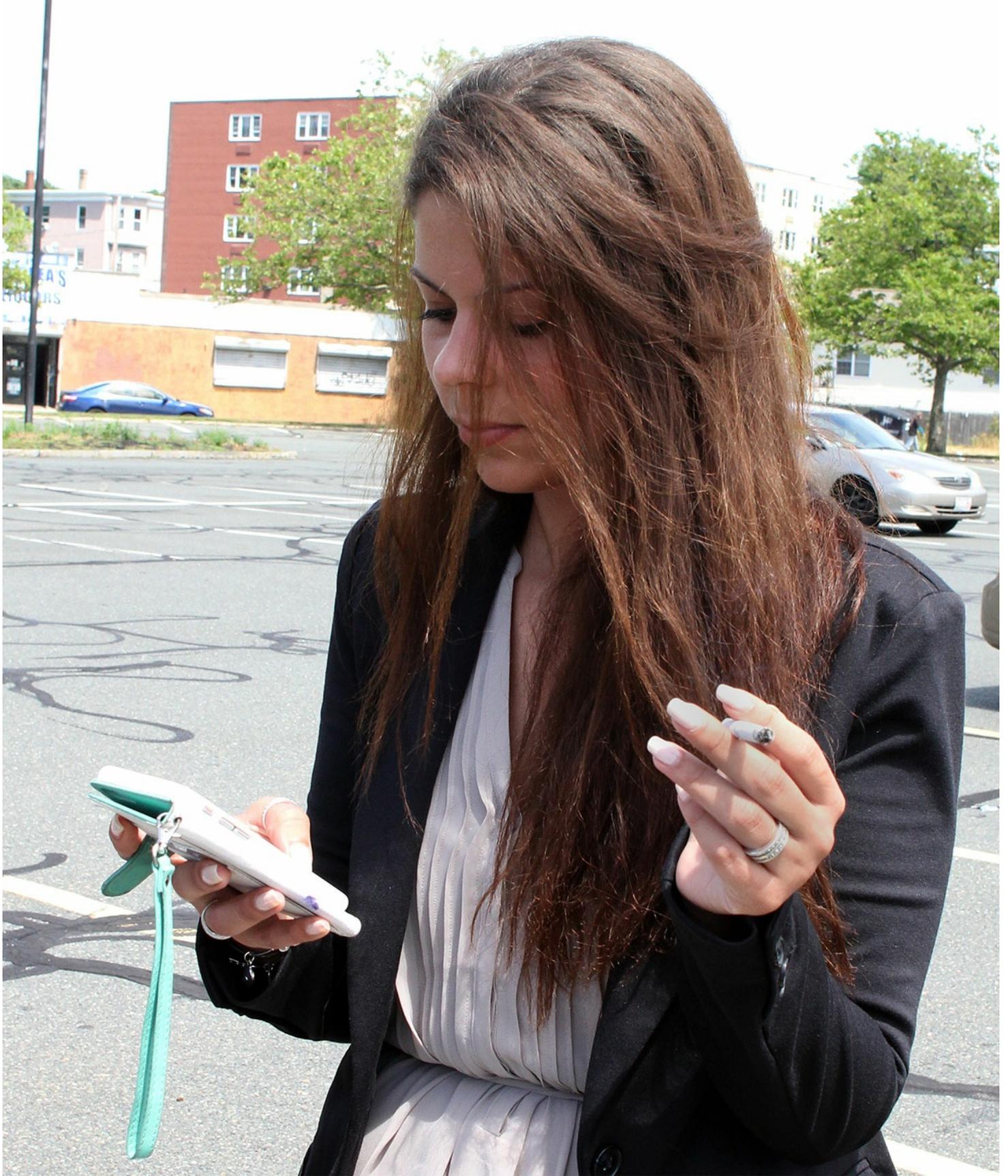
Kids may start smoking because of peer influences and curiosity, she said. During their teen years, she said kids are often risk-takers. Despite those reasons, she said it is not typical to smoke, adding that 89 percent of Massachusetts teenagers are nonsmokers.

Andrew Petty, **Marblehead's** director of public health, said teens smoke because of peer pressure and trying to fit in.

A young person's lungs are still developing. By smoking, their lungs may not develop properly, which could lead to issues throughout life, he added.

By limiting access to youth through raising the minimum age in Marblehead, he said health risks would also be

combated.



“We are hoping that it would significantly decrease the number of teenage smokers,” Petty said.

Jelena Kostadinovic, a 24-year-old **Winthrop** resident and student at the community college, said starting to smoke is one of her biggest regrets. She smoked for the first time six years ago while on vacation in **Bosnia**.

She thought it was just a new experience, but it continued after returning home. She quit for a month. But after having issues at home and because of stress, she went back to it.

“Now, when I’m trying to quit, it feels impossible,” Kostadinovic said.

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