

Teen smoking prevention progresses in KC metro

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Kansas City, Mo. — Officials say a campaign to prevent teen smoking in Kansas City is progressing faster than expected.

A local campaign called Tobacco 21 began in October, and now nearly half the residents in the metro area must be 21 to buy tobacco products, The Kansas City Star reported.

Organizers say the progress is due to a partnership between public health advocates and the business community.

“It is a powerful example of what can be done to drive public health when health experts and the business community work together,” said Scott Hall, who now leads the chamber’s Healthy KC initiative. “The marriage of the two has been the thing that has driven this so fast.”

Traditionally, anti-tobacco campaigns have focused on raising taxes, and many felt those increases unfairly targeted smokers. Hall said that the Tobacco 21 campaign has encountered less opposition because it happens at the local level and focuses on teenagers and young adults.

Ninety-five percent of adult smokers start before they turn 21, according to Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids spokesman John Schachter. Ninety percent begin when they’re 18 or younger.

A report from the Institute of Medicine said if all states raised the legal age for tobacco purchase to 21, there would be a 12 percent drop in teen and young adult smokers.

“In the 21st century, communities that are the healthiest are communities that grow the fastest and are the strongest,” Hall said. “Tobacco cessation is a key part of building that healthy community.”

The campaign’s ordinances also give cities the authority to regulate e-cigarettes, which were essentially unregulated by the federal government until recently.

Implementing ordinances to increase the minimum age of sale and purchase of tobacco products is being discussed in the Missouri cities of Liberty and Lee’s Summit, as well as Tonganoxie.

