

Naperville stores must raise tobacco sale age to 21

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- Naperville will ban the sale of tobacco products to anyone younger than 21 beginning Jan. 1.

Daily Herald file photo

Stores in Naperville no longer will be allowed to sell tobacco products to anyone younger than 21 beginning Jan. 1.

The prohibition will extend to alternative nicotine products such as e-cigarettes as of Jan. 1, 2018, after the city council voted to increase the age restrictions in an effort to protect young people's health.

The move reduces the likelihood cigarettes will make their way into high schools through teens' social networks, advocates said.

Katy Leclair, executive director of 360 Youth Services, said raising the age "limits opportunities for youth to make unhealthy decisions."

Dr. James Ostrenga, a physician who sits on the city's liquor and tobacco control commission, told city council members Monday that suburban Boston communities that raised the tobacco age are seeing decreases in youth tobacco use.

Naperville could see that positive change, too, he said, helping stop teens from going down a dangerous path that could lead to addiction.

Not everyone believes the ordinance will create such an effect. Council members Kevin Gallaher, Kevin Coyne and Paul Hinterlong voted against it.

"I think this is a symbolic effort more than a real effort," Gallaher said, noting that 18- through 20-year-old cigarette

buyers can -- and will -- head to neighboring towns such as Lisle and Aurora to buy their supplies once Naperville's ban takes effect. "I think the real effort would be the state taking action."

Hinterlong and Coyne said they don't want to limit the personal choice of people who are legal adults in many ways, including being able to vote, join the military and handle their own lives.

But that argument didn't sway council member John Krummen, who spoke firmly against smoking and the cancers it can cause.

"I disagree that this is a right that everyone should have," he said. "I don't get that. You have to have a right to do something that could kill you?"

The updated ordinance does not criminalize the purchase, possession or use of cigarettes or alternative nicotine products by people younger than 21. It only serves to prohibit stores from selling the items to customers who are not yet 21. The penalty would be a fine between \$100 and \$500, city prosecutor Kavita Athanikar said.

The ban on sales of alternative nicotine products waits a year to go into effect to give businesses that frequently sell to young people the chance to adjust their plans or move out of town.

Mayor Steve Chirico said he hopes the ban will be effective at preventing teens and young adults from starting to smoke. And he hopes its symbolism will have an effect on lawmakers in Springfield, too.

Naperville joins Chicago, Evanston and Oak Park, which previously moved to ban sales of tobacco to people younger than 21.