

Cambridge Tobacco 21

November 25, 2013

It's simple math: Raising the minimum tobacco sales age to 21 will dramatically reduce tobacco use in Cambridge.

2% of tobacco sales produces 90% of new smokers. Cigarette sales to those under 21 account for only 2.12% of total sales. But, because 90% of smokers start before the age of 21, these are the very sales that produce more than 4 out of every 5 new smokers. This means that the impact on retailers will be minimal.¹

Raising the minimum tobacco sales age to 21 can reduce smoking rates to single digits. Only 10% of smokers start at the age of 21 or older.² If the current smoking rate is about 20%,³ then by simple math, if someone reaches the age of 21 as a non-smoker, that individual has only a 2% chance of becoming a smoker ($.1 \times .2 = .02 = 2\%$). In Cambridge where the smoking rate is down to 9%, a young person would only have a 3% chance of becoming a smoker ($.1 \times .09 = .009 = \text{less than } 1\%$) at the age of 21 or above.

This strategy is already working. Needham, Massachusetts raised the minimum tobacco sales age to 21 in 2005. In 2006, the town had a youth smoking rate of about 13% compared with 15% in the surrounding communities. By 2010, the youth smoking rate in Needham was down to 6.7% while the surrounding communities' rate only decreased to 12.4%. The percent decline in youth smoking in Needham was nearly triple that of its neighbors.⁴ This year, Arlington, Ashland, Canton, Dedham, Dover, and Sharon, went to 21. Last week NYC and the Big Island of Hawai'i also enacted tobacco 21 policies.

90% of people who purchase for distribution to minors are between the ages of 18 and 20.⁵ Since most students do not reach twenty-one years of age while still enrolled in high school, increasing the legal age of sale would greatly reduce the number of students who could purchase tobacco products. By decreasing the number of eligible buyers in high school, this action will help reduce youth smoking by decreasing the access of students to tobacco products.

A similar strategy was highly successful in addressing alcohol sales. A national age 21 law for alcohol sales resulted in dramatic reductions in drunk driving fatalities.⁶ At the time, some critics of the policy argued that because 18 year-olds can vote and enlist in the military, they should be allowed to be sold alcohol. Despite these arguments, the increase in the minimum sales age for alcoholic beverages has saved tens of thousands of lives of young drivers, their passengers, and others on the road.⁷

¹ Analysis of National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data from 2011 by Jonathan P. Winickoff, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School.

² This is a conservative estimate. The American Lung Association has found that only 15% of smokers start at age 21 or above. See, e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey, 2008. Analysis by the American Lung Association, Research and Program Services Division using SPSS software.

³ CDC. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. "Current Cigarette Smoking. Among Adults — United States, 2011." November 9, 2012. 61(44):889-894.

⁴ Analysis of 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) data by Jonathan P. Winickoff, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School.

⁵ Difranza JR, Wellman RJ, Mermelstein R, et al. The natural history and diagnosis of nicotine addiction. *Current Reviews in Pediatrics*. 2011;7(2):88-96.

⁶ Wagenaar AC. Minimum drinking age and alcohol availability to youth: Issues and research needs. In: Hilton ME, Bloss G, eds. Economics and the Prevention of Alcohol-Related Problems. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) Research Monograph No. 25, NIH Pub. No. 93-3513. Bethesda, MD: NIAAA; 1993:175-200.

⁷ NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis, March 2005. "Calculating Lives Saved Due to Minimum Drinking Age Laws." Washington, DC, U.S., DOT.

8.28.030 - Access of minors to tobacco products.

A.

Sales to minors persons under age 21 prohibited:

1.

No person shall sell tobacco products or permit tobacco products to be sold or otherwise furnished to a minor person under the age of 21 years ~~or, not being the minor's parent or guardian, no person shall give tobacco products to a minor.~~

2.

No person shall sell or permit the sale of tobacco products unless the location at which the tobacco products are available for purchase is posted with a notice which is clearly visible to anyone purchasing such products and which states: "~~Massachusetts~~ The City of Cambridge ~~state law~~ prohibits the sale of tobacco products to any person under the age of ~~eighteen~~ twenty-one (1821) years of age. See ~~M.G.L. chap. 270, sect. 6~~ Cambridge Ordinance 8.28.030." Said notice shall be that notice provided by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health ~~and is available from the Cambridge Public Health Department.~~

3.

Each retailer shall verify by means of photographic identification containing the bearer's date of birth that no person purchasing the product is younger than ~~eighteen~~ twenty-one (1821) years of age. No such verification is required for any person over the age of 26.

B.

Tobacco sales permit:

1.

No person shall sell tobacco products within the City of Cambridge without first obtaining a tobacco sales permit issued by Inspectional Services.

2.

As part of the application process, the applicant will be provided with instructions on compliance with G.L.c.270 section 6 (sales of tobacco to minors and penalties for violation thereof), a copy of this ordinance and compliance with this chapter.

3.

Each applicant is required to sign a statement declaring that the applicant has read said instructions and that the applicant is responsible for instructing any and all employees who will be responsible for tobacco sales regarding the law.

4.