Mayor proposes raising tobacco-buying age to 21 to curb teen smoking

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CHICAGO, Ill. — Teens and young adults are likely to stop smoking if they have to ask someone who’s 21 or older to buy cigarettes for them. Better yet, perhaps they will never start.

That’s the premise of research that supports a new plan put forth by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel last week. It would raise the minimum age for buying tobacco.

Experts say the approach is gaining popularity around the country. The research, from the Institute of Medicine in Washington, D.C., estimated such laws would discourage smoking at an age when many people first get addicted. Chicago would join a list of more than 100 cities nationwide to raise the legal age for buying tobacco from 18 to 21.

“Older smokers have a higher quit rate than younger smokers. Older smokers are more likely to get treatment,” said Carol Southard, a tobacco treatment expert at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago. “The literature has been so consistent that if we can ... (delay) the kid from starting in the first place, or at least get the kid to stop before they’re 21, we’ve done something significant.”
Study Prompts Re-examination Of Legal Tobacco Age

Most states long ago set the legal tobacco age at 18. But the study, which came out last March, sparked a new look at the issue.

The study concluded that raising the minimum age to 21 would help delay when young adults and adolescents start using tobacco. Almost 90 percent of adult daily smokers say they began smoking before they were 19, according to the study.

Researchers said a minimum age of 21 would be particularly effective. That's because young people who are unable to buy tobacco are most likely to get the products from friends and peers. It is less likely a 21-year-old would be in the same social circles as high school or middle school students, and thus able to provide cigarettes, according to the report.

The researchers’ model makes a compelling prediction. It says that if all states immediately raised the minimum age to 21, there would be a 12 percent decrease in tobacco use among today's teenagers by the time they become adults.

Smokers Weigh In

Young adult smokers who were stopping for a puff at Chicago's DePaul University recently offered mixed responses to the idea.

A 19-year-old said the change might make her kick the habit she picked up when she started college last fall. The woman declined to give her name because her parents don't know that she smokes.

“I wouldn’t go out of my way to get people (21 and over) to buy them for me,” she said.

Others, like Joseph Saye, 22, said younger smokers will be able to find ways around the law. Saye has smoked since he was 19. He said he doubts an older age requirement would have much effect.

But Lila Johnson, program manager for tobacco prevention and education at the Hawaii Department of Health, said the new study helped to convince officials there to establish a legal age of 21 for buying tobacco. Hawaii's law, the only one of its kind in the country, became effective this month.

Protecting Young Adults, Preserving Health

“The scientific basis landed right in our lap,” Johnson said. “We don't see the negative side effects because it's going to protect young people, it's going to protect our vulnerable populations. We hope to be able to show the difference that it makes.”

Chicago’s mayor is taking other steps as well. He has announced his intention to raise tobacco product taxes, set minimum quantities of tobacco that can be sold and set minimum prices.
Should City Council members approve new pricing and age restrictions, it would be the latest in a series of moves targeting tobacco use.

Chicago consistently has ramped up tobacco taxes. The city leads the nation in federal, county, state and city taxes on cigarettes, which now total $7.17 per pack. The city added electronic cigarettes to its indoor smoking ban in 2014. In the same year, the Chicago Park District expanded its ban on smoking to include public parks and harbors.

**Raising Legal Drinking Age Lowered Fatalities**

The growing push to raise the tobacco purchasing age evokes a similar effort to raise the drinking age nearly 40 years ago.

Drinking alcohol long was seen as part of growing up — so much so that several states lowered the legal drinking age to 18 in the 1960s and 1970s, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

But fatal alcohol-related traffic crashes spiked after that. The NIH said that alcohol affected 60 percent of all deadly crashes by the mid-1970s. Two-thirds of fatal accidents for people between the ages of 16 and 20 involved alcohol during that time.

President Ronald Reagan signed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act in 1984. The law promised to keep federal highway funding from states that had not raised the legal drinking age to 21. Drunken-driving deaths have been cut in half since the early ’80s, according to the NIH.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a survey on raising the minimum smoking age to 21. It concluded that 75 percent of adults -- including 70 percent of smokers -- favored the idea.
Quiz

1. Which sentence from the introduction (paragraphs 1-4) would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

(A) That's the premise of research that supports a new plan put forth by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel last week.

(B) "Older smokers have a higher quit rate than younger smokers. Older smokers are more likely to get treatment," said Carol Southard, a tobacco treatment expert at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago.

(C) Teens and young adults are likely to stop smoking if they have to ask someone who's 21 or older to buy cigarettes for them.

(D) Chicago would join a list of more than 100 cities nationwide to raise the legal age for buying tobacco from 18 to 21.

2. All of the following details from the article contribute to the development of its central idea EXCEPT:

(A) The research, from the Institute of Medicine in Washington, D.C., estimated such laws would discourage smoking at an age when many people first get addicted.

(B) It says that if all states immediately raised the minimum age to 21, there would be a 12 percent decrease in tobacco use among today's teenagers by the time they become adults.

(C) He has announced his intention to raise tobacco product taxes, set minimum quantities of tobacco that can be sold and set minimum prices.

(D) Should City Council members approve new pricing and age restrictions, it would be the latest in a series of moves targeting tobacco use.

3. The first two sections of the article discuss the merits of changing the law based on research. Which sentence from the section "Smokers Weigh In" provides a counterargument to the research?

(A) Young adult smokers who were stopping for a puff at Chicago's DePaul University recently offered mixed responses to the idea.

(B) A 19-year-old said the change might make her kick the habit she picked up when she started college last fall.

(C) "I wouldn't go out of my way to get people (21 and over) to buy them for me," she said.

(D) Others, like Joseph Saye, 22, said younger smokers will be able to find ways around the law.
What is the purpose of the article’s final paragraph?

(A) to illustrate how many health problems can be addressed through gathering data

(B) to provide a closing point of evidence to support the mayor’s argument

(C) to explain that data supports lowering the smoking age, but not the drinking age

(D) to imply that most smokers wish that they had not started smoking so young
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