



ISSUE

Reducing Tobacco and Nicotine's Harm

MMA Position

In order to ensure effective enforcement and compliance, the Legislature must pass legislation increasing the age to purchase tobacco, e-cigarettes, and other products containing nicotine to conform with federal law. Legislators should also act to protect young people from the dangers of e-cigarettes and vaping. The most effective way to reduce nicotine addiction among young people is to prohibit the sale of e-cigarette flavors like candy, dessert, fruit, and mint, as well as the sale of menthol tobacco.

Background

Tobacco and nicotine remain a problem here in Minnesota and nationwide. More than 6,000 Minnesotans die from tobacco-related diseases, and treating these diseases costs the state more than \$3 billion every year. Preventing youth from starting to smoke or using nicotine is the single most effective way to reduce the harm of these products.

In December 2019, federal law increased the age to purchase tobacco and nicotine to 21 years. The federal government has also enacted measures to prohibit the use of youth-friendly e-cigarette flavors pod-based “closed system” devices such as Juul and Blu. The federal action still allows these flavoring to be used in other e-cigarette devices.

Increasing the age to purchase tobacco will not only prevent 18 to 20-year olds from accessing tobacco and nicotine, it will also reduce nicotine addiction among younger teens. Research indicates that increasing the age to 21 will lead to a 25 percent reduction in smoking initiation among 15 to 17-year olds. More than 95 percent of smokers begin by the age of 21.

The use of e-cigarettes among youth is a serious and sharply increasing problem. Research in 2019 showed that one in four teens have used an e-cigarette in the past 30 days, an increase of almost 80 percent over 2018 rates. There is little question that youth-friendly flavors such as

fruit, candy, dessert, and mint contribute to the sharply increasing rates of vaping among youth. The growing body of research into the effects of nicotine vaping demonstrates that these products are very risky, particularly to young people. Prohibiting the sale of flavors intended to appeal to young people is a smart, effective way to reduce the appeal of these products among youth.

Talking Points

- While the federal government has increased the age to 21 to purchase tobacco and nicotine products, Minnesota must enact its own T21 law to ensure effective enforcement and compliance.
- Preventing youth from starting a lifetime of nicotine addiction is among the single most effective ways to make Minnesota the healthiest state in the nation while reducing unnecessary health care costs, disease, and death.
- The use of e-cigarettes among Minnesota's youth is skyrocketing, with surveys of young people suggesting the use of the devices has doubled in recent years. Dozens of deaths were linked to vaping products in 2019, and the long-term effects of e-cigarettes is unknown. E-cigarette vapor contains heavy metals, carcinogens, and other dangerous materials.
- To effectively reduce youth usage of e-cigarettes, the state should act to reduce the appeal of vaping by limiting the types of flavoring that can be sold. Youth-friendly flavors including fruit, desserts, candy, and mint should be prohibited.

¹ <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/index.html>

² Institute of Medicine, Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015, <http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>. Minnesota Department of Health, *Minnesota Student Survey*. 2019