

Statewide Tobacco 21 Goes into Effect Aug. 1

Tobacco 21 will reduce youth tobacco use, save lives

New Ulm, Minnesota (7/29/20) – Minnesota’s statewide tobacco sale age is changing from 18 to 21 starting August 1. The statewide Tobacco 21 law is the latest step in the movement to reduce youth access to addictive tobacco products, including e-cigarettes. This effort was driven by 75 local communities that passed Tobacco 21 since 2017.

Youth tobacco rates have risen dramatically in recent years, driven by youth vaping high nicotine e-cigarettes. Between 2016 and 2019, youth vaping rates rose to 26 percent among Minnesota 11th-graders, and 11 percent among Minnesota 8th-graders.

“Tobacco 21 is a tremendous victory for health,” said Karen Moritz, Brown County Public Health Director. “We must reverse rising youth tobacco rates that threaten the health of local teens and the long-term well-being of our community. This is an opportunity to protect young people from lifetime addiction and encourage all people who use commercial tobacco to make a quit attempt.”

The National Academy of Medicine estimates raising the tobacco age to 21 will lead to enormous health gains, including a 25 percent reduction in smoking initiation among 15-to-17-year-olds. Nearly 95 percent of addicted adult smokers started before 21. Tobacco 21 will keep commercial tobacco products out of teen social circles, since there are many 18-year-olds but few 21-year-olds in Minnesota high schools.

Raising the state tobacco age aligns Minnesota with the federal Tobacco 21 law that was passed in December 2019 and immediately went into effect. In addition to aligning with the federal tobacco age, the state Tobacco 21 law updates the state’s tobacco definitions, penalties and signage requirements to ensure strong compliance and enforcement.

Minnesota residents of any age can access free help to quit commercial tobacco in all forms, including cigarettes, chew, cigars, snuff and vapes, through the state’s Quit Partner program www.QuitPartnerMN.com. Quit Partner offers quitting support via coaching and quit-tobacco medications, such as nicotine patches, gum, and lozenges. Through Quit Partner, residents can access tailored quitting programs, including a teen support program called My Life, My Quit. To access these 24/7 services, Minnesotans can visit quitpartnermn.com or call 1-800-QUIT NOW.

“We need strong, healthy lungs and I’m grateful to Minnesota leaders who supported the lifesaving Tobacco 21 movement,” Moritz added. “I hope we can continue to take steps to protect our youth from commercial tobacco, so each of them can grow up strong and free from addiction.”