21 reasons to raise the tobacco sale age to 21 in Washington State

1. Tobacco use is the No. 1 preventable cause of death, and we should do everything we can to prevent it among young people.¹

2. The Institute of Medicine has concluded that raising the tobacco sale age to 21 will have a substantial positive impact on public health and save lives.²

3. 69% of Washington voters support raising the legal sale age for tobacco products to age 21.³

4. About 95% of all adult smokers start smoking before the age of 21.⁴

5. More than 480,000 people die every year from tobacco use in the United States, including 8,300 in Washington.⁵

6. 13,700 Washington kids try smoking for the first time each year.⁶

7. Another 2,100 Washington kids become regular smokers each year.⁷ Unless smoking rates decline, 104,000 Washington kids will ultimately die prematurely from smoking.⁸

8. The 18-21 age range is a time when many smokers transition from experimentation with tobacco to regular use.⁹

9. Delaying the age when young people first begin using tobacco will help reduce the risk that they will become addicted tobacco users.¹⁰

10. Tobacco use causes approximately $170 billion in health care costs in the U.S. each year, including $2.81 billion in Washington state.¹¹

11. Use of tobacco products in any form is not safe, especially during adolescence, as such use can lead to nicotine dependence and subsequent tobacco related diseases and death.¹²

12. Adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods of growth and development. Consequently, young people are more sensitive to nicotine's addictiveness and can become addicted more quickly than adults.¹³

13. Individuals who start smoking at younger ages are more likely to smoke as adults and are also among the heaviest users.¹⁴

14. Tobacco companies target kids and young adults – they know that's when most users become addicted to tobacco.¹⁶

15. Tobacco companies spend $9.5 billion per year, including $92.8 million in Washington state, to promote their deadly products—much of that marketing directly influences kids and young adults.¹⁷
16. Tobacco company marketing causes the onset and continuation of smoking among kids and young adults. 17

17. Tobacco companies market smokeless tobacco, little cigars and electronic cigarettes in kid-friendly flavors, like cotton candy, gummy bear, cherry and grape. In fact, 81 percent of kids who have ever used tobacco products started with a flavored product. 19

18. While smoking rates are declining among Washington youth, twice as many Washington 10th graders use e-cigarettes (12.7%) than smoke cigarettes (6.3%). There is substantial evidence that e-cigarette use increases risk of ever using combustible tobacco cigarettes among youth and young adults. 22

19. Friends and classmates are a common source of tobacco products for youth users. Raising the tobacco sale age to 21 would help keep tobacco out of high schools. 23

20. Tobacco companies admit that increasing the legal sale age for tobacco will reduce smoking. An internal Philip Morris document stated, "Raising the legal minimum age for cigarette purchase to 21 could gut our key young adult market (17-20)...." 24

21. California, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon and at least 350 localities in 20 states have raised the tobacco sale age to 21. 25


