



RAISING THE TOBACCO SALE AGE TO 21: RESPONSES TO MISLEADING NATO/SWEDISH MATCH ARGUMENTS

Public health efforts to protect youth from the tobacco industry in the point-of-sale environment are gaining momentum nationwide. The tobacco industry is organizing to oppose these efforts. For example, the National Association of Tobacco Outlets (NATO) and cigar and smokeless tobacco company Swedish Match recently launched a website with misleading arguments and information on the impact of local ordinances targeting the point of sale. The website is called Tobacco Ordinances – Take Another Look (TOTAL) and addresses policies related to price, flavored products, legal minimum sale age of 21, and others.

Each day, about 2,300 kids in the United States try their first cigarette and another 350 kids under the age of 18 become regular, daily smokers; and, almost one-third will eventually die from smoking.¹ Since tobacco is so harmful, we should do everything we can to prevent tobacco use among young people. Increasing the legal sale age of tobacco products to 21 will help. It will prevent tobacco use among young people, reduce smoking and save lives.

Tobacco companies know that a higher legal sale age will help deter youth from smoking. Since the industry needs to recruit new smokers to keep the tobacco business profitable, it is desperate to protect its ability to attract youth at the point of sale, regardless of the impact on the health and welfare of young people.

The industry's arguments do not withstand scrutiny. Below, we provide responses to its false claims.

Most adult smokers start smoking before age 21.

- Virtually all adult smokers started smoking before reaching age 21, and four out of five started even younger, before age 18.²
- Most smokers move from experimentation to regular smoking between ages 18 and 21. By age 21, 4 in 5 smokers are smoking every day.³
- If we can keep people from starting to smoke as kids or young adults, then most will never smoke.

Underage youth - especially 15, 16, and 17 year olds close to the current legal age of 18 - often obtain cigarettes from social sources. This is precisely why this policy is needed. A tobacco sale age of 21 will make it more difficult for these youth to get cigarettes from social sources.

- Three in four smokers ages 15 to 17 obtain cigarettes from social sources.⁴ This is not surprising given that it is both illegal for retailers to sell tobacco products to them, and their social networks are likely to include legal purchasers age 18 or 19.
- Raising the tobacco sale age to 21 helps keep tobacco out of high schools where younger teens often obtain tobacco products from older students. With the minimum legal sale age set at 21 instead of 18, legal purchasers would be less likely to be in the same social networks as high school students and therefore less able to sell or give cigarettes to them.⁵

Tobacco use is an addictive and deadly behavior and most people never make an adult choice to smoke. The industry targets kids – and kids start smoking.

- Addiction to tobacco is the opposite of personal liberty and freedom.
- Most smokers begin smoking as teenagers, before they can fully appreciate the consequences of becoming addicted to the nicotine in tobacco. Once a person is addicted, it is difficult to stop.
- We don't have a specific age in our society where you're free to do whatever you want. We determine the appropriate age for various activities based upon their risk and reward – and tobacco has incredibly high risk and absolutely no reward.

Raising the tobacco sale age will reduce smoking and save lives.

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM), one of the most prestigious scientific authorities in the United States, strongly concluded that raising the tobacco sale age to 21 will improve public health and save lives.⁶
- A tobacco sale age of 21 reduces access to tobacco products directly by restricting sales to 21 and older adults and indirectly by making it harder for underage high school students to access social sources of

- tobacco. Increasing the sale age to 21 will reduce tobacco use among youth and young adults – age groups when nearly all smoking begins and that are heavily targeted by the tobacco industry.
- The most powerful impact of the policy is the reduction in access by high school teens ages 15 to 17. Reduced access to tobacco by teenagers discourages experimentation with smoking and can also reduce the intensity of smoking, postpone smoking, and potentially make quitting easier.

Fact sheets and other material on raising the tobacco sale age to 21 are available at:
[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what we do/state local/sales 21](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what_we_do/state_local/sales_21)

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), HHS, Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH: Detailed Tables, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DET-Tabs-2016/NSDUH-DET-Tabs-2016.pdf>; CDC, “The Health Consequences of Smoking – 50 Years of Progress A Report of the Surgeon General 2014,” <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/50-years-of-progress-by-section.html>

² United States Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. ICPSR36361-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-03-22. <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36361.v1>; see also 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>

³ United States Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. ICPSR36361-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-03-22. <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36361.v1>; see also 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>

⁴ Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health Study, “Highlighted Findings From Wave 1, of the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study,” Slide 63, presented at 2016 Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco Conference, Chicago, Illinois.

⁵ 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://www.iom.edu/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>

⁶ 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://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>; In addition, a recent study suggests that raising the sale age to 21 is a promising practice, finding that the policy contributed to a greater decline in youth smoking in one community that passed a 21 ordinance compared to comparison communities that did not pass an ordinance restricting tobacco product sales to 21 and older. While the results are promising, the magnitude of the impact is unknown given that there are no baseline measurements and there were confounding issues that were not controlled for. See Kessel Schneider, S. et al, “Community reductions in youth smoking after raising the minimum tobacco sales age to 21,” *Tobacco Control*, June 12, 2015, <http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2015/06/12/tobaccocontrol-2014-052207.1.abstract>