California Poised to Become Second State to Raise Smoking Age

By Shawntaye Hopkins
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California would follow Hawaii to become the second state to change its smoking age to 21 if a bill passed by lawmakers earlier this month is signed by the governor.

The California bill would prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone under 21 as well as the purchase of tobacco products by anyone under that age. The age limit also would apply to electronic devices that deliver nicotine or other vaporized liquids.

On June 19, 2015, Hawaii Gov. David Ige signed a law that prohibited the sale, purchase, possession or consumption of cigarettes, other tobacco products and electronic smoking devices--also known as e-cigarettes--to anyone under age 21. The law went into effect Jan. 1.

“Raising the minimum age as part of our comprehensive tobacco control efforts will help reduce tobacco use among our youth and increase the likelihood that our keiki will grow up to be tobacco free,” Ige said, according to a news release by governor’s office. (Keiki is a Hawaiian word for children.)

Many states—including Pennsylvania and West Virginia—have recently considered changing the state smoking age.

In January, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie vetoed a bill that would have raised the legal age to purchase traditional cigarettes and e-cigarettes to 21. The nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services estimated the bill would have cost the state $16.2 million in lost sales taxes, according to NJ.com. Also, electronic cigarette business owners argued that their products provide a safer alternative to traditional tobacco cigarettes and help people stop smoking.

According to a March 4, 2016, story in The Boston Globe, a Massachusetts bill referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means would ban selling, and using, cigarettes and other tobacco products to anyone under 21.

However, many Massachusetts communities already have raised the smoking age to either 19 or 21. Across the country, individuals under 21 are prohibited from buying cigarettes in more than 100 cities, according to Tobacco 21, a group that advocates the age boost.

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