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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: April 7, 2019

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Tobacco 21 Law Passes in Illinois

Raising minimum legal sales age to 21 could lower smoking rates 12 percent

Oak Forest, IL – Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) officials would like to thank Governor Pritzker for signing HB345 into law – raising the minimum legal sales age to 21 for all tobacco products. This initiative, known as Tobacco 21, affects all tobacco retailers and residents in Illinois, and will go into effect on July 1, 2019.

Illinois is the 10th state in the U.S. and first state in the Midwest to prohibit the sale of tobacco products, electronic cigarettes and alternative nicotine products to any person under the age of 21. This is following local adoption by many communities in the state, who were ahead of the curve.

The benefits of Tobacco 21

According to the American Lung Association, “Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the U.S., killing close to half a million people each year.” About 230,000 Illinois teens alive today will die prematurely from smoking.ⁱ

“The teen years are a critical time for tobacco prevention,” said Dr. Terry Mason, CCDPH Chief Operating Officer. “The adolescent brain is uniquely vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and nicotine addiction.”

Ninety-five percent of smokers start before age 21ⁱⁱ. In Illinois, 5,700 teens become new daily smokers each year.ⁱⁱⁱ Nearly a third of suburban Cook County high school seniors use tobacco products.^{iv} This new Tobacco 21 policy will help to:

- **Reduce teen access to tobacco products.** Research shows the majority of underage tobacco users rely on friends and acquaintances to get tobacco. Raising the minimum legal sales age to 21 makes it less likely those who can legally purchase tobacco are within teens’ social circles and also keeps tobacco out of schools.
- **Lower smoking rates an estimated 12%** by the time today’s teenagers become adults. The biggest reductions could be seen among 15-17 year olds (25%) and 18-20 year olds (15%).^v
- **Improves overall health of the community.** Residents’ exposure to secondhand smoke and the associated health effects will be lessened now and in the future.
- **Supports health equity.** The tobacco industry has historically targeted communities of color, low-income communities, LGBTQ individuals and people with mental illness, resulting in disparities in tobacco use and health outcomes. Policy change like Tobacco 21 has the potential to help reduce these disparities.
- **Helps reduce health-related costs** associated with tobacco use. Each year, tobacco use costs Illinois \$5.49 billion in health care costs and \$5.27 billion in lost productivity.^{vi}

The role of public health

CCDPH testified in support of passing this legislation at the state, county, and local levels; and partnered with municipalities throughout suburban Cook County (SCC) to pass local Tobacco 21 policies to protect SCC residents. These included: Arlington Heights, Berwyn, Elk Grove Village, Evanston, Hoffman Estates, Maywood, Oak Park, Park Ridge, Rolling Meadows, Skokie, Wilmette, and unincorporated Cook County.

CCDPH will be working with SCC municipalities to raise awareness about the new Tobacco 21 law benefits and help with implementation before the law goes into effect July 1, 2019. As part of its Healthy HotSpot initiative, CCDPH promotes tobacco-free living in the places we live, work, learn, worship, play and receive healthcare.

For more information

Visit www.healthyhotspot.org for more information about: Tobacco 21, smoke-free housing, smoke-free parks, secondhand and thirdhand smoke, e-cigs and hookah.

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ⁱ Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids. (2018). The Toll of Tobacco in Illinois. Available at <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/illinois>

ⁱⁱ Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. (2015) Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products. Available at www.iom.edu/tobacominimumage.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* Note 1.

^{iv} University of Illinois, Center for Prevention Research & Development. (2016). Illinois Youth Survey. Available at <https://iys.cprd.illinois.edu/>.

^{v, vi} *Ibid.* Note 2.