

Tobacco



Mythbuster

Institute of
Public Health



Myth

At 18 it's a person's choice whether to start smoking and we shouldn't restrict them from accessing a legal product, they know the risks.



Reality



Most people, and especially young people, underestimate the addictive and harmful nature of tobacco. If tobacco was being introduced today, it is likely it would not be legally licensed for sale due to its harmful properties.



Myth

If I can have sex at 16, get married, drink alcohol and drive a car at 18, why should I be restricted from using tobacco? This is the nanny state.



Reality



Neither sex, marriage, alcohol nor driving kill half of their users. One in two smokers will die of a tobacco-related disease. Tobacco 21 will help to delineate tobacco from other products and denormalise tobacco in society.



Myth

Not many young people smoke tobacco these days anyway, it's a dying habit among the young so there is no need for Tobacco 21 laws.



Reality



Tobacco use has declined among children and young people but rates remain too high. There is some evidence that the downward trend in youth smoking is levelling off, or even reversing. This means more action is needed if we wish to retain the benefit of tobacco control for children today and in the future.



Myth

Tobacco 21 laws will make no difference because young people get their tobacco from friends rather than in shops.



Reality



While it's true that many children and young people get their tobacco from friends, studies show that one third of 11 to 17 year olds report buying it in a shop, and one in six reported buying in a supermarket. Shops remain a significant supply source for children and young people.



Myth

Tobacco 21 will make no difference because no-one starts smoking after age 18 anyway.



Reality



The average age at which young people start smoking has been increasing over time, and there is plenty of evidence that some start smoking over the age of 18. Also by raising the age to 21 it will change retailer behaviour on age verification and prevent accidental sales to people under 18.



Myth

Tobacco 21 will criminalise young people.



Reality



The retailer carries the responsibility to follow the law, not the customer.



Myth

Tobacco 21 won't work because young people will buy tobacco online instead.



Reality



Data suggest few young people buy tobacco online. Age verification for online purchases can be amended to align with in-person purchases under Tobacco 21.



Myth

Tobacco 21 is impractical - it won't be workable to do this in Ireland and it hasn't worked in other countries.



Reality



Tobacco 21 already exists in several countries. Ireland is well equipped with learning from those implementation experiences and it's own experience in rolling out the workplace smoking ban in 2005. Evaluations of Tobacco 21 show that it is successful in reducing tobacco use.



Myth

Tobacco 21 is at odds with government policy in Ireland.



Reality



Tobacco 21 is fully aligned with the government's commitment to a tobacco endgame as set out in the Tobacco Free Ireland policy. It is also aligned with the Irish government's signature to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.



Myth

Tobacco 21 will drive children and young people to use e-cigarettes instead, isn't that just as bad?



Reality



A new law is already being progressed to prohibit the sale of e-cigarettes to under 18s. This could easily be amended to age 21. The Health Research Board have assessed evidence on the health effects of e-cigarettes and the relationships between e-cigarette and tobacco use in children. Based on this research, accessibility of both products should be restricted for children and young people.



publichealth.ie

Dublin Office
700 South Circular Road
Dublin 8
DO8 NH90, Ireland
T: + 353 1 478 6300

Belfast Office
6th Floor, City Exchange
11-13 Gloucester Street
Belfast
BT1 4LS, Northern Ireland
T: + 44 28 90 648494

info@publichealth.ie



@PUBLICHEALTHIE

**Institute of
Public Health**

