



## Chris Christie signs controversial bill to change smoking age in New Jersey — e-cigs also affected

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In a surprising move, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (R) signed into law on Friday a bill that will raise New Jersey's smoking age from 19 to 21.

NJ.com reported the bill, which has been pushed by some left-wing lawmakers and groups in the state since at least 2014, will also increase the age required to purchase electronic smoking devices, such as electronic cigarettes.

In a statement issued by Christie's office, the governor said increasing the age to 21 will help curb smoking because young people will have "more time to develop a maturity" about the dangers of smoking.

"By raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco products to 21, we are giving young people more time to develop a maturity and better understanding of how dangerous smoking can be and that it is better to not start smoking in the first place," Christie said. "My mother died from the effects of smoking, and no one should lose their life due to any addictive substance."

Christie also said the legislation will help lower health care costs in the state, because using tobacco products has been linked to other health problems.

"Additionally, the less people who develop costly tobacco habits that can cause health problems, such as lung cancer, heart disease and developmental issues, the less strain there will be on our healthcare system," Christie said.

Only two other states require purchasers of tobacco products to be at least 21 years old, California and Hawaii. The state legislature in Maine has approved legislation that would increase the state's smoking age to 21 there as well, but Gov. Paul LePage (R) has yet to sign it, and according to ABC News, he hasn't announced whether he will or not.

Researchers at the Cato Institute, a pro-liberty think tank, have said raising the smoking age doesn't significantly reduce youth smoking rates, because the factors most important to determining whether a person will become a smoker or not have little to do with smoking laws.

"Very few teens buy cigarettes at a retail outlet; the overwhelming majority (95 percent) get their tobacco from friends or family," wrote Patrick Basham and John Luik for the Cato Institute and New York Post. "So, the retail accessibility of tobacco is largely irrelevant to their decision to smoke."

“There’s an easy way to check this: If easier retail access to tobacco were a cause of increased smoking, then you’d expect to find less youth smoking where access to tobacco was more tightly controlled — but the real-world evidence says otherwise,” they added. “The widespread restrictions on accessibility in California, for example, have largely failed to shift youth smoking levels.”

Even if raising the tobacco age to 21 does substantially smoking rates in New Jersey, the decision to raise the age at which people can purchase electronic cigarettes, which don’t contain any tobacco and have been proven effective at helping people to quit smoking tobacco, seems contradictory to the stated purpose of the legislation.

Vendors caught selling cigarettes or electronic smoking devices to people under the age of 21 could be fined as much as \$1,000 per violation.