

New Board of Health Regulation increases purchase age of tobacco and nicotine products from 18 to 19 and older

As of December 1, 2012, the sale of tobacco and nicotine delivery products in Watertown will be restricted to those 19 and older. A year in the making, the regulation was passed on August 15, 2012 by the Watertown Board of Health. The new law will affect the various tobacco retailers within the town and will make it harder for teens to get access to tobacco and nicotine delivery products.

Data has shown that about 90% of current smokers become addicted before the age of 18. As a result, the Watertown Board of Health has focused its efforts on prevention by placing an added obstacle to deter teenagers from going down the road to addiction. “A regulation aimed at increasing the purchase age of tobacco and nicotine products to 19 is good public health policy as research has shown that those who delay the onset of smoking are less likely to develop a smoking habit.” said Steven Ward, Watertown’s Director of Public Health.

At a public hearing on July 18, 2012, members of the Watertown Board of Health were pleased to hear testimony from a Brookline Health Department employee that students there influenced their local government to increase the tobacco product purchase age from 18 to 19, largely in order to reduce rates of teen smoking at the high school and to have a consistent nicotine policy for all high school seniors.

Watertown will join Belmont, who increased their tobacco purchasing age to 19 in August of this year, and Brookline who will be implementing a similar regulation in the Spring of 2013. In 2005 the Town of Needham was the first Massachusetts community to raise the minimum sales age to purchase tobacco, thereby laying the groundwork for other Massachusetts towns and cities to follow suit. “We are pleased to join the communities of Brookline, Belmont and Needham by increasing the age at which youth may purchase tobacco and nicotine delivery products,” stated Dr. John Straus, Chair of the Watertown Board of Health. “Our hope is this regulation will have a positive impact on the health of our youth and that 20 or 30 years from now we will have reduced the morbidity and mortality issues related to the use of tobacco products”.