

Headline:	Raising minimum legal age for smoking: Making it harder for youth to light up Prof Chia Kee Seng, Dean, Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, commented on how youth are more susceptible to nicotine dependency and supported the move to raise the minimum legal age for smoking from 18 to 21. The Health Ministry outlined several reasons for taking this step, including the fact that regular tobacco use is usually established between 18 and 20 years of age.
Source:	Straits Times, page A8
Date:	Friday, 10 March 2017
Coverage:	Local, SSHSPH
Tone:	Neutral

Making it harder for youth to light up

Raising legal smoking age to 21 will protect young people during more susceptible years

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The minimum legal age for smoking will be raised from 18 to 21, to make it harder for young people to get hold of cigarettes at a time when they are more vulnerable to peer pressure and the addictive effects of nicotine.

The Health Ministry outlined several reasons for taking this step, including the fact that regular tobacco use is usually established between 18 and 20 years of age.

Singaporeans are also starting to smoke at a younger age. In 2013, the average age a smoker began lighting up was 16, compared with 17 in 2001, according to the National Health Surveillance Survey.

Tobacco use is linked to a host of health problems, from cancer to emphysema to heart disease. In 2015, six Singapore residents died prematurely each day from smoking-related diseases.

Singapore is not the first to introduce such a measure, as some parts of the United States and countries such as Sri Lanka have enforced a higher minimum smoking age of 21 too.

It also comes as the number of tobacco retail outlets in Singapore has fallen to a record low, and on the heels of a shisha ban that took full effect in August last year.

Currently, retailers who sell tobacco to those under 18 may be fined up to \$5,000 for the first offence, and \$10,000 for repeated breaches. Their licence may also be revoked by the Health Sciences Authority, which enforces tobacco control laws here.

Those below 18 caught using, buying or possessing tobacco products can be fined up to \$300.

Supporting the move, Professor Chia Kee Seng, dean of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore, noted: "Tobacco companies are known to target youth in their marketing to get them addicted as early as possible. Youths are also more susceptible to nicotine dependency."

Several studies have found that adolescent brains are more vulnerable to the rewarding effects of nicotine, the addictive substance found in tobacco products.

Dr K. Thomas Abraham, chief executive of Sata CommHealth, said the latest measure will "effectively challenge perceptions of tobacco as a 'normal' product". "At 21, adolescents become young adults who are more mature, more rational and less impulsive," added Dr Abraham, an anti-smoking advocate.

The move also aligns with the stance of the World Health Organisation, which stated in a 2008



Student Chrystine Wong, who drew her first puff at 15 after a friend gave her a cigarette, agrees that raising the legal age would be beneficial. However, the 23-year-old, who quit the habit two years ago, believes that teens will still find a way to get their hands on cigarettes if they really want to do so. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

report that people who do not start smoking before 21 are unlikely to ever begin.

Two-thirds of underage smokers in Singapore obtain their tobacco from friends and schoolmates, according to the latest Student Health Surveys (2014-2016).

With the new rule, the number of legal buyers in an underage person's social circle is expected to

be reduced, said the ministry.

Student Chrystine Wong, 23, who drew her first puff at 15 after a friend gave her a cigarette, agrees that raising the legal age would be beneficial.

"It gives you more time to think before you can buy your own pack of cigarettes," she said.

Yet Ms Wong, who stopped smoking two years ago, said she and her

schoolmates were able to get cigarettes through their older siblings.

"If you really want to do it, there's no way anyone can stop you," she noted.

Mr Muhd Hafiz, 33, started smoking at 14 under the influence of his schoolmates and, by 18, was puffing 20 cigarettes a day. They would make modified photocopies of identity cards to dupe tobacco sellers.

The handyman, who quit smoking last year after signing up for the Health Promotion Board's I Quit programme, is unconvinced that the legal age matters that much.

Echoing Ms Wong, he said: "There is always a way for kids to get cigarettes - unless you ban them."

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Headline:	Legal age for smoking to be raised to 21 Prof Chia Kee Seng, Dean, Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, gave examples of studies where youths who do not pick up smoking before the age of 21 are unlikely to pick up the smoking habit at all. MOH announced that the legal age for smoking and buying tobacco products in Singapore will be raised from 18 to 21.
Source:	Channel 5, Channel NewsAsia (Singapore Tonight)
Date:	Thursday 09 March 2017, 9.00pm (Channel 5) Thursday 09 March 2017, 10.00pm (CNA)
Coverage:	Local, SSHSPH
Tone:	Neutral



shrinking. He speculated that the Government was trying to transform Singapore into a medical hub for rich people from other countries.

Links:

- a. [All Singapore Stuff Facebook \(72 comments\)](#)
- b. [The Straits Times Facebook \(21 comments\)](#)
- c. [Channel NewsAsia Facebook \(20 comments\)](#)
- d. [Yahoo! News Singapore \(12 comments\)](#)
- e. [Yahoo Singapore Facebook \(4 comments\)](#)

19) Grooming more community care nurses (ST, pA8)

With healthcare shifting away from acute hospitals and into people's homes, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is looking for ways to get nurses to follow suit. Currently, only 4,900 of Singapore's 34,000 or so practising nurses are in the community care sector. MOH plans to add 900 more by 2020. "If we want to go beyond healthcare to health, we need nurses to deliver preventive health in the community," said Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor during the debate on the ministry's Budget yesterday.

Similar report:

- a. [More training for nurses to improve basic and community care skills \(ZB, p10\)](#)

20) Making the switch, relishing the challenges (ST, pA8)

Ms Ong Shu Fen decided to make the switch to community nursing 2 1/2 years ago, after two years of working in a hospital ward. Her current role requires her to think on her feet and be a lot more independent, challenges that she relishes. "The learning curve is very steep; your skills must be very good and you need to know a lot," said the 28-year-old senior staff nurse. "In the hospital... you have the help of speciality nurses, but you don't have that in people's homes."

21) Minimum legal age for smoking to be raised to 21 (ST, pA1)

To deter young people from taking their first puff, the minimum legal age for smoking will be bumped up from 18 to 21. The legislative changes will be proposed in Parliament within a year, and phased over a few years.

Similar reports:

- a. [Making it harder for youth to light up \(ST, pA8\)](#)
- b. [Legal smoking age to be raised to 21 \(TDY, p1, 6\)](#)
- c. [Legal age for smoking to be raised to 21 \(TNP, p1\)](#)

- d. [Minimum legal age for smoking and purchase of cigarettes rased to 21 \(ZB, p1\)](#)
- e. [Minimum Legal Age to buy cigarettes raised to 21 \(SM, p6\)](#)
- f. [Banning those below 21 from buying cigarettes \(WB, p1, 4\)](#)
- g. [Proposal to increase the minimum age of smoking to 21 years \(BH, p5\)](#)
- h. [Legal age for smoking to be raised to 21 \(CNA TV News\)](#)
- i. [Legal age for smoking to be raised to 21 \(Ch5 TV News\)](#)
- j. [Legal age for smoking to be raised to 21 \(Ch8 TV News\)](#)

22) Online: Proposal to raise legal smoking age to 21 drew varied reactions

Various channels reported on the proposed law to raise the legal smoking age from 18 to 21 as announced by SMS (MOH) Dr Amy Khor during the MOH Committee of Supply (COS) debate.

Many expressed approval towards raising the legal smoking age from 18 to 21 and suggested that smoking be banned altogether. A few held that, aside from contributing to cleaner air, the move would prevent the youth from picking up the habit. One suggested that smokers apply for a license to smoke, while another proposed that fines be imposed to compensate for the revenues lost in banning smoking among people aged below 21.

In contrast, many also disfavoured the measure and observed that the Government deemed a person below 21 too young to smoke but saw the same as old enough to be enlisted in the NSF and carry firearms, be tried as an adult in courts, be married, engage in sex and have children, drive and vote. A few sarcastically commented that the Government viewed smoking as more risky to the youth than porn, online betting and casinos. A few others insisted that it was their right to smoke, and those who smoked claimed to be in better health than non-smokers. A few added that vehicular emissions contributed more to air pollution than smoking.

A few expressed scepticism of the effectiveness of such a ban, as youths would simply request others to purchase cigarettes for them or that some sellers would operate underground. A few opined that the Government was lagging in terms of law enforcement, as youths would still buy cigarettes and smoke without being caught. Another expressed doubt that cigarette sellers could demand proof of age from cigarette buyers.

A few suggested either a ban or raising the age for drinking as well, considering it to go hand in hand with smoking. A few were in favour of letting smokers pay higher premiums for insurance schemes such as MediShield Life.

Links:

- a. [Channel NewsAsia Facebook \[1\] \[2\] \(440 comments\)](#)
- b. [The Straits Times Facebook \(261 comments\)](#)
- c. [TODAY Facebook \(136 comments\)](#)
- d. [All Singapore Stuff Facebook \(110 comments\)](#)
- e. [Yahoo Singapore Facebook \(106 comments\)](#)
- f. [HardwareZone Forum \(74 comments\)](#)

23) Parents, counsellors laud move (TDY, p6)

The move to raise the legal age for smoking to 21 has drawn cheers from counsellors and parents worried about their teens being influenced to pick up the habit. But tobacco retailers also pointed to some practical problems that may arise, such as whether licensed over-the-counter cigarette sellers will now have to be above a certain age.

24) She was sacrificing food for cigarettes to feed habit (TDY, p6)

Her first cigarette was given to her when she was 14 or 15 years old. From smoking socially, Ms Chrystine Wong established a regular habit by 16. She smoked two to three sticks a day, and would get her friends to buy the cigarettes — which was “the only way to get them” — or share a pack with them.

25) Healthcare counsellor considers elderly like her own parents (BH, p4)

Ms Nurhashimah Mohamed Ramli is one of the counsellors at the Community Health Centre (CHC) under the National Health Group (NHG). Healthcare counsellors are tasked to contact and reach out to the elderly - which aims to help residents at risk of getting diabetes to manage their health through regular visits and by changing their lifestyle. The programme is supported by the People's Association.

26) From the Gallery: Health is wealth, and so are the arts (ST, pB8)

ST described the discourse at Parliament yesterday. It noted Minister's speech emphasising on the need to keep Singaporeans healthy in mind and body, and noted the three Rs that Minister spoke of in Parliament, being Refraining from unhealthy food, Reducing the amount of such food one eats and Replacing them with healthier alternatives. It also highlighted the rising rate of dementia, noting that a new measure will empower members of the local communities such as GPs to detect the disease early.

27) Out of the box (ST, pB6)

A wide range of issues, from mental health to pop culture, was raised by MPs yesterday, the last day of the Budget debate. Of note to MOH, the paper highlighted MP Tin Pei Ling calling for a creation of a database for senior citizens with dementia so that the community can better identify and help them. It also noted MP Christopher De Souza who called for MOH to sponsor an academy that focused on the training and professional development of allied health workers so as to help them keep up with medical advancements and share best practices.

28) An added touch of harmony (ZB, p13)

ZB's Nam Yunzhou shared his thoughts on the past 8 days of parliamentary budget debate sessions and noted that there is more harmony in this year's Budget debate. He added that MOH's enhanced efforts to bring healthcare into the community, and