

# Parliament: Bill tabled to raise minimum smoking age from 18 to 21

[straitstimes.com/singapore/parliament-bill-tabled-to-raise-minimum-smoking-age-from-18-to-21](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parliament-bill-tabled-to-raise-minimum-smoking-age-from-18-to-21)

Linette Lai

02/10/2017

SINGAPORE - Singapore took its first legal step towards raising the minimum smoking age from 18 to 21, with a new bill presented in Parliament on Monday (Oct 2).

If passed, the bill to amend the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act will also make it illegal for people to own imitation tobacco products such as e-cigarettes.

Currently, it is against the law to import, distribute, sell or offer to sell such products. With the changes, those who own e-cigarettes can also be fined up to \$2,000.

The bill was tabled by Health Minister Gan Kim Yong for the first reading. It will be debated at a future sitting.

In a statement attached to the bill, the health ministry said that raising the minimum legal age is intended "to reduce, with a view to ultimately eliminating, the opportunities for the young to be tempted and take up smoking before attaining 21 years of age".

In Singapore, the years between age 18 and 21 are when nearly half of smokers start to light up on a regular basis. The average age at which people began to light up has also gone down, from 17 in 2001 to 16 in 2013.

Nee Soon GRC MP Louis Ng, who is a former smoker, called the proposed amendment a "crucial step forward".

"I started smoking when I was about 18 years old," he said. "Research by the World Health Organisation shows that people who don't pick up smoking before age 21 are unlikely to ever start."

Related Story

[Singapore raises minimum legal age for smoking from 18 to 21: 4 other suggestions to deter first puff](#)

Related Story

[21, 18 or 14: A look at the legal age for smoking around the world](#)

Medical experts welcomed the proposed changes, but said they should be complemented by other anti-smoking measures.

These include more prominent public campaigns

such as deterrent ads on buses, and higher taxes such as in Australia, where a packet of cigarettes can cost over AUD\$30 (S\$32), said Dr K. Thomas Abraham, chief executive of Sata CommHealth which conducts community health programmes. Stronger enforcement action is also required, he added.

Dr Tan Kok Kuan, a resident doctor at Dr Tan & Partners @ Novena, said though that there is a case to be made for permitting certain types of e-cigarettes that contain tobacco but no flavourings.

These provide smokers with the nicotine fix, but are less likely to entice young smokers, he said.

"I'm of the opinion that being 100 per cent smoke free is not possible," he said. "It makes sense to allow products

which are not healthy, but are less harmful than the ones we currently have."