

# Hawaii governor signs first-of-kind state smoking age bill

June 20 2015, byCathy Bussewitz

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Hawaii Gov. David Ige talks about raising the smoking age on Friday, June 19, 2015, in Honolulu. Ige signed a bill into law that made Hawaii the first state in the nation to raise the legal smoking age to 21. (AP Photo/Cathy Bussewitz)

Hawaii's governor has signed a bill to make his state the first to raise the legal smoking age to 21.

The measure aims to prevent adolescents from smoking, buying or

possessing both traditional and [electronic cigarettes](#). Gov. David Ige signed it into law Friday.

Dozens of local governments have similar bans, including Hawaii County and New York City.

"Raising the minimum age as part of our comprehensive tobacco control efforts will help reduce tobacco use among our youth and increase the likelihood that our keiki will grow up tobacco-free," said Ige, using the Hawaiian word for children.

In Hawaii, 86 percent of adult smokers began smoking before age 21, according to the governor's office.

"I think it's going to have a tremendous impact," said Jessica Yamauchi, executive director of the Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Hawaii. "By really limiting the access it will really help to curb the prevalence."

But opponents say it's unfair that a veteran returning from military service who risked his or her life serving the country could be prevented from lighting up.

"I can't stand cigarette smoking. It's disgusting," said Democratic Rep. Angus McKelvey, who voted against the bill. "But to tell somebody you can go and fight for your country and get killed but you can't have a cigarette, that's the thing. You can enter a contract. You're an emancipated adult in the eyes of the Constitution but you can't have a cigarette anymore."

Those caught breaking the rules would be fined \$10 for the first offense, and later violations would lead to a \$50 fine or mandatory community service.

The bill goes into effect on the first day of 2016. Until then, the state Department of Health will reach out to retailers and post signs to educate the public about the law.

According to the state Department of Health, 5,600 kids in Hawaii try smoking every year. Meanwhile, 1,400 people die from tobacco use or exposure in Hawaii every year, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

Ige signed another anti-smoking measure Friday to make Hawaii's state parks and beaches smoke-free.

"This allows us to put one more impediment to people [smoking](#) too much," Ige said.

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