

NEWS RELEASE
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Health Department convenes Lawrence Tobacco 21 Task Force in conjunction with Great American Smokeout

(Lawrence, KS) – The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department is convening the first meeting of a Lawrence Tobacco 21 Task Force on Thursday, Nov. 16, in conjunction with the Great American Smokeout, an annual event where smokers are encouraged to quit tobacco. The meeting will be from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Lawrence College and Career Center, 2910 Haskell Ave., and it is open to the public.

The Task Force is comprised of representatives from various agencies, including Lawrence Public Schools, University of Kansas and Lawrence Memorial Hospital. Its goal is to increase the age to sell tobacco from 18 to 21 to help save lives.

According to a 2015 report from the Institute of Medicine:

- People who have not used tobacco by age 21 are unlikely to ever start.
- Kids who use tobacco commonly get it from people between the ages of 18 and 20.
- Raising the sales age to 21 across the United States could result in a quarter of a million fewer premature deaths.

“Studies suggest that underage smokers have access to tobacco products from peers who are just old enough to buy tobacco products,” said Community Health Director Chris Tilden. “Raising the legal age to 21 makes it harder for those underage to get access to tobacco and increases the odds that they won’t become smokers.”

Five states and more than 270 cities and counties, including 18 in Kansas, have increased the tobacco sales age to 21.

“By creating a task force, we hope to be able to join these municipalities in helping to save lives,” Tilden said. Tobacco is a leading risk factor for cancer and heart disease, which are the leading causes of death in Douglas County, responsible for more than two of every five deaths. Nationally, cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths annually, including nearly 42,000 deaths resulting from secondhand smoke exposure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nine out of 10 adult smokers start before age 18, and starting at a young age makes it even harder to quit. “Nicotine is a highly addictive drug and adolescents, who are still going through critical periods of growth and development, are particularly vulnerable to its effects,” said Director of Clinic Services Kim Ens, a registered nurse. “Most smokers want to quit, but it’s extremely difficult to do.”



According to the CDC, 68 percent of U.S. adult smokers reported in 2015 that they wanted to quit completely. That percentage is 66 percent for smokers, ages 18 to 24.

The Health Department encourages smokers to talk to their doctor, employer or a quitline coach because they will be more successful at quitting. “Don’t go cold turkey, get help,” Ens said. “Get a coach, get medicine and don’t give up. It takes most smokers multiple attempts to quit, so if you fail — try again.”

The Kansas Tobacco Quitline — www.KSquit.org or 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669) provides information and free one-on-one coaching to help tobacco users quit. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

About the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department

The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department has served the Lawrence and Douglas County community for more than 120 years. Its mission is to advance policies, practices and programs that promote health for all, prevent disease and protect the environment.

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