

Nicotine-Free Generation Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Won't youth just go to the next town over?

When Needham Massachusetts became the first town to enact Tobacco 21, opponents of the policy made the argument that youth between 18-21 would just buy from the next town over. Yet following the passage of Tobacco 21, we saw the steepest decline in youth smoking ever recorded in Needham with a more than 50% decrease in high school smoking. The percentage of high schoolers who smoked declined at nearly triple the rate in Needham compared to surrounding towns that had not adopted the policy ([Winickoff 2014](#); [Schneider 2016](#)). Decreasing access to tobacco in even one town has been proven to work.

Doesn't NFG take away free choice for adults? Doesn't it infringe on personal rights?

The tobacco industry likes to frame NFG as a free choice issue. However, [95% of tobacco use begins before the age of 21, and 99% before 26](#). Early tobacco use is more likely to lead to addiction, which by definition means the loss of free choice. There is no free choice when addiction drives desire. Tobacco is not a freedom, it is an addiction and a burden—just ask people who use tobacco. Do they smoke because they want to, or because they need to?

Because tobacco has been sold legally for so long, it's understandable why it might feel like a right or freedom. However, bans on sales of lead paints, asbestos, or FDA-banned supplements for public health reasons obviously don't take away any "personal rights." Tobacco has caused the greatest health detriment of any consumer product in history, killing more people annually than [AIDS, alcohol, care accidents, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined](#). NFG does not take away personal rights or freedoms, it phases out the sale of a dangerous and addictive product.

Is NFG constitutional?

Nicotine is not a constitutional right. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court upheld the legality of NFG policy in Brookline, affirming that it was "not inconsistent with the Constitution" and was "rationally related to the town's legitimate interest in mitigating tobacco use overall and in particular by minors" (see [Six Brothers Inc. v. Town of Brookline](#) pg. 11 and 32).

Doesn't NFG split adults into two groups? Why are we judging who is "adult enough" to buy nicotine?

It is important to remember that tobacco products are dangerous at all ages; there is no safe age of nicotine sale. NFG recognizes that nicotine is a harmful and addictive product that should not be sold to anyone: it's not about who is an adult or not. The goal of the cutoff date is to ensure a smooth, practical transition to a nicotine-free future. The distinction NFG makes is rational, because it allows sale to individuals already using nicotine, and curtails sales to those too young to be using at the time the law is passed. This approach avoids a black market, safeguards future generations from addiction, gives retailers time to adjust, and continues nicotine access for current users.

What about veterans?

Men and women who choose to serve in the United States armed forces have greater military readiness, including increased stamina, fitness, and work capacity, when they do not use tobacco products. ([Institute of Medicine 2009](#)). Additionally, they enjoy superior wound healing ([Silverstein 1992](#)) and are nearly twice as likely to successfully complete basic training ([Klesges 2000](#)). NFG will improve our military readiness over time because fewer and fewer recruits will use tobacco products. Someone who is addicted to tobacco will have more trouble hauling gear over distance due to their diminished lung capacity. NFG does not change current veterans' access to tobacco in any way. Rather, it aids the creation of a stronger and more resilient group of future American servicemembers.

What about young people who have already been trapped by their tobacco addiction?

What happens to them with NFG?

Over time, there will be fewer and fewer users who fall into this category. However, safe and effective FDA-approved nicotine (NRT) is available throughout Massachusetts over the counter and is covered by all Massachusetts insurance programs. In addition, the MA quitline gives away free NRT as part of their program. As an outcome of NFG, those who are already addicted to tobacco products will now use safe and freely available FDA-approved nicotine, retaining more money to spend on basic necessities, experiencing a lower incidence of disease, and living longer, more productive lives.

Will a “Black Market” develop?

NFG doesn't create additional black market sales. In fact, the policy attempts to avoid further black market nicotine, because current users can continue to legally be sold nicotine, and therefore have no need to turn to a black market. NFG also prevents future generations from becoming addicted, gradually shrinking the dependent user base the black market relies on. Reducing demand for nicotine products means reducing black market sales. A 2015 study found that banning menthol cigarettes resulted in [no surge in illicit cigarettes](#). NFG is even safer than menthol bans because it never removes access to nicotine where a demand exists.

Isn't NFG like Prohibition?

NFG is nothing like Prohibition. Prohibition fueled a massive Black Market because it immediately removed access to a substance that [at least half of the adult population wanted to use](#). It removed the supply of alcohol while demand remained high, creating a huge economic incentive for illegal sales. On the other hand, NFG naturally reduces nicotine demand over time by preventing those under a certain age from becoming addicted. Additionally, NFG never removes the nicotine access of current users like Prohibition did, preventing any increase in illegal sales.

How can I support this while Marijuana access is increasing, etc.?

Nicotine-Free Generation addresses the specific issue of nicotine use, and does not hinder other public health initiatives in any way. Supporters of NFG recognize that nicotine is uniquely

dangerous and addictive, and that the policy offers a practical way to prevent tobacco-related deaths among the next generation. Additionally, as NFG starts to reduce the scope of the tobacco issue, it will allow more public health resources to be allocated towards addressing other problems over time.

Is NFG too experimental? Is it actually being considered anywhere else?

NFG is innovative, and builds on the success of tobacco age restrictions such as Tobacco-21. Though it is a relatively new approach, NFG has already received serious consideration globally. British Prime Minister Sunak proposed an NFG law in 2023, which received endorsement from King Charles and the Opposition Party. In New Zealand, NFG was nearly enacted on a nationwide scale until a new government came in and succumbed to tobacco industry pressure in early 2024. Bills have been forwarded in California, Hawaii, Minnesota, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Denmark, Spain, France, and the European Union. Six towns in Massachusetts have already adopted the policy, likely with more to come following the MA Supreme Judicial Court ruling that upheld the policy in Brookline. Policymakers everywhere are recognizing the effective approach and public benefit that NFG provides.

Will NFG hurt small-business retailers?

Nicotine-Free Generation laws are gradual, and the market for tobacco will only decline gradually each year. Most retailers won't see a difference for years. The policy provides time for retailers to develop their business model so as to not depend on selling a harmful and exploitative product.

Why are we preventing nicotine from being sold to adults? Shouldn't we focus on youth use?

NFG aims to tackle youth nicotine addiction first, by preventing youth from ever trying nicotine and becoming addicted. 99% of smokers start before they are 26 ([2014 Surgeon General Report](#)). NFG Over time, youth will be further removed in age from anyone who can be sold nicotine legally.

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