

CITY BEAT



## Chicago high school students smoking less, health department report says

**BY JULIE WHITEHAIR**  
For the Sun-Times

A record low 6 percent of Chicago high schoolers reported smoking cigarettes in 2017, the city announced Monday.

The rate is down from 13.6 percent in 2011, according to findings from a new report by the Chicago Department of Public Health. The drop in teen smoking comes after Chicago raised the minimum age of buying tobacco products from 18 to 21 in 2016.

The report included data from the national Youth Risk Behaviors Survey, which asks high school students about behaviors such as tobacco use, according to Health Commissioner Dr. Julie Morita.

Morita attributed the decline in teen smoking to several factors, including an increase in the mini-

mum age to buy tobacco, the city's high cost of tobacco products and marketing campaigns against tobacco use.

The city has allotted \$2 million of e-cigarette tax revenue to be used for four new school-based health centers by 2019, Health Department spokeswoman Anel Ruiz said. These centers, which provide primary care to CPS students and the community, include a center at Steinmetz College Prep, centers in development at Drake Elementary and Chicago Vocational Career Academy, and a center planned for Englewood Community High School.

The department's report also shows use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes among 18- to 20-year-old residents decreased from 15.2 percent in 2015 to 9.7 percent in 2016.

Bill Clinton as he took on major tobacco companies.

"I'm satisfied that the policies and the changes we made to take on the tobacco companies and protect our kids are showing results," Emanuel said. "I set out a goal back in 2011 that we wanted to actually create the first tobacco-free generation. And we can see the goal line now for the first time. It's within reach."

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those who haven't used tobacco by age 21 are unlikely to start, according to the Cook County Health Department report.

While Illinois' minimum age to buy tobacco products is 18, legislation was introduced in the 2017 General Assembly to raise the age to 21.

### REPORT FINDINGS

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*Department of Public Health*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel said stopping youth tobacco use has been both a personal and professional mission for him, since he watched his mother struggle with smoking when he was growing up and he worked alongside then-President

Chicago is one of six Cook County municipalities to raise the minimum age of purchasing tobacco, the Daily Herald reported in December. The others: Berwyn, Elk Grove Village, Evanston, Maywood and Oak Park.

Lake County and six communities in that county also raised the purchasing age: Buffalo Grove, Deerfield, Highland Park, Lincolnshire, Mundelein and Vernon Hills.

Still, Morita acknowledged there's more work to be done. Monday's announcement shows 7.2 percent of teens reported smoking cigars, 4.5 percent used smokeless tobacco, and 6.6 percent used e-cigarettes.

Morita said that because tobacco companies reshape products to appeal to youth, "we have to be on our guard at all times."