SAN FRANCISCO — Starting Oct. 1, drug store shoppers here will have to look elsewhere for their nicotine fix.

San Francisco’s board of supervisors voted 8-3 Aug. 5 to give final approval to a ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies that Mayor Gavin Newsom had proposed in April, after having passed it on a first read July 29.

Supporters of the ban say tobacco sales contradict drug stores’ role as healthcare providers and influence the acceptability of smoking, while opponents say the ban is unfair because it affects drug stores while exempting grocery and big-box stores.

But the big question is, what happens when it takes effect?

Drug store chains don’t really know how to fill what will soon become vacant real estate at the front of their stores.

“I don’t know that anyone has any idea what we’re going to put there,” Rite Aid spokeswoman Cheryl Slavinsky said. “It’s unfair that a drug store would be prohibited from selling tobacco, but a grocery or mass-market store across the street wouldn’t be.”

Walgreens isn’t sure what to do, either. “We are considering all of our options regarding the ban, but haven’t made any decisions yet,” spokeswoman Carol Hively said, though she would not speculate on what those options included.

Walnut Creek, Calif.-based Longs Drugs recently opened its first San Francisco

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What you said about it:

* It’s fair—drug stores are part of the healthcare system, so it’s kind of hypocritical for them to sell cigarettes. 20%

* It’s a good idea in theory—but it should be applied fairly across all channels of retail pharmacy (i.e., all food, drug and mass retailers that operate pharmacies). 27%

* It’s unfair to single out drug stores, period—drug stores sell smoking cessation products, unlike most other retailers that sell cigarettes. 16%

* It’s unfair to consumers—it shouldn’t be up to local government to decide arbitrarily where adults can buy cigarettes. 29%

Other 5%

Source: Drug Store News Online Poll
San Francisco
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store, which does not sell tobacco products, but Longs spokesman Mark Holz said that was due to the store’s small size rather than the impending tobacco ban.

Once the ban takes effect, the city’s public health department will stop issuing tobacco licenses to pharmacies, department spokesman Jim Soos said. Meanwhile, inspectors who periodically visit licensed stores to make sure they don’t sell to minors will add to their list of duties ensuring that pharmacies aren’t selling tobacco products. The pharmacies can continue selling their tobacco stocks until Oct. 1. Soos speculated that after that, they would probably ship remaining stocks to stores outside the city.

But they might want to think twice if they plan to ship them to neighboring Marin County.

According to the *Marin Independent Journal*, health officials there have proposed a similar ban, which could go before the county’s board of supervisors as early as this fall.

Holz said that in the event a Marin County ban passed, Longs’ response would depend on each store, due to variations in store size and layout, and the merchandise department would address the matter as it emerged. He did not know of any examples of how stores could respond.

Newsom is expected to sign the ordinance into law within 10 days of its reaching his desk.