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New Data Show Tobacco, Alcohol and Sugary Drinks Still Being Promoted to Youth

Survey Demonstrates Need to Protect Children from Unhealthy Product Promotions

Stores in Contra Costa regularly carry and promote products such as candy-flavored tobacco products, sweetened alcoholic drinks and sugary beverages designed in a manner that are appealing to youth, according to data from a new statewide survey released today.

The survey showed that 77% of stores selling tobacco near schools in Contra Costa sell tobacco products with youth-friendly flavors like watermelon, tropical blast and cherry limeade. In addition, many flavored cigarillos and little cigars sell for under \$1, making them attractive and affordable to youth, said Daniel Peddycord, Contra Costa Health Services' Public Health Director.

“We have flavored cigarillos being sold three for one dollar across the county,” Peddycord said. “These products clearly appeal to youth. The candy and fruit flavoring makes the tobacco more palatable to a new smoker, and the price is right for youth without a lot of money to spend.”

The survey data was released by health advocates today at a series of 13 regional press events throughout California as part of *Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community*, a 10-year statewide campaign to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impacts of unhealthy product marketing in the retail environment. The campaign is a collaboration of public health departments in California, nonprofits and community groups.

The extensive survey collected information from a sample comprised of more than 7,100 stores in all 58 counties in California that sell tobacco – including more than 200 convenience, supermarket, liquor, tobacco, small market, discount, drug and big-box stores in Contra Costa – with the goal of shedding light on what products are available and promoted in our communities. The information was collected in the spring of 2016.

According to the survey data, six in 10 stores in Contra Costa have exterior advertising for unhealthy products like tobacco, sugary drinks and alcohol. Seventy-seven percent of stores that sell alcohol and tobacco sold “alcopops,” sweetened alcoholic drinks available in single bottles or cans that often resemble energy drinks popular with youth. While sweet, alcopops are potent and dangerous — one 24-ounce can contain as much alcohol as four or more standard drinks.

“There’s a perception that alcopops are less harmful than other alcoholic beverages, which is absolutely not true,” said Fatima Mata Sol, Contra Costa Health Services’ Alcohol & Other Drugs Program Chief. “We need to make sure youth and their parents understand the risks associated with drinking alcopops. Youth are our most precious resource, and we should support policy strategies that prevent access by youth.”

The findings also show that electronic cigarettes are widely available in Contra Costa. Close to two-thirds of stores in Contra Costa sell e-cigarettes, battery-operated products that turn nicotine and other chemicals into an aerosol that is inhaled by the user. Statewide, the number of stores selling e-cigarettes has risen sharply, from 46% of stores in 2013 to 62% in 2016.

Peddycord said the rising availability of e-cigarettes across the region is concerning because “they are a gateway for youth to move on to smoking.”

In response to concern from local public health officials, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors last year directed public health staff to draft a set of policies to protect youth from tobacco influences in the community, including regulating the sale of flavored tobacco products and pack size of little cigars and cigarillos. The City of El Cerrito adopted such measures in October, 2015, after hearing the results from the last Store Survey report in 2014.

Peddycord said policymakers in Contra Costa and elsewhere should consider additional measures to protect youth and others from unhealthy products. For instance, Peddycord suggested prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, and requiring a minimum pack size for the sale of little cigars and cigarillos. Peddycord also said cities can adopt policies to reduce promotion of unhealthy products to youth, including limiting the amount of signage on storefronts.

“The results from this survey clearly point to the need for the community to work together to protect Contra Costa youth from tobacco influences,” said Mary Jaccodine, co-chair of the Contra Costa Tobacco Prevention Coalition. “The Tobacco Prevention Coalition is greatly concerned about the marketing of these products, and we are working with partners to create a healthier and safer Contra Costa.”

For state, regional and county specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, visit www.HealthyStoresHealthyCommunity.com. For County Specific materials, (www.cchealth.org) can also be visited.