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New Survey Finds Alcohol and Tobacco Products Still More Available than Milk and Fresh Fruit

Just released findings from statewide survey shows disparity in availability of healthy and unhealthy products

Mariposa CA – March 8, 2017 – Recently released research shows that in Mariposa County the availability of e-cigarettes and vaping devices has increased by 65% since 2013. This finding is part of new research released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

Today, throughout California, health advocates held 13 press events to release results of the scientific survey, which is the largest of its kind. It builds upon initial research released three years ago in March 2014 and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products during this time. Information was collected in the summer of 2016 from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties including pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores as well as tobacco-only stores. **Twenty six (26) stores were surveyed in Mariposa County.**

“Overall, I am concerned about the increased availability of tobacco products while at the same time not having healthy options available to our residents and visitors,” said Dr. Eric Sergienko, County Health Officer. “Stores play a critical role on our community’s health, and this survey shows what is being offered differs from what we as a healthy community should be doing, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options. Our goal is to shift the balance back towards health.”

The survey found the following for Mariposa County:

- In addition to selling cigarettes, the number of stores that sell single “little cigars” or cigarillos, has doubled to 65%. What’s more, several stores sell a popular brand of “little cigars” individually for under a dollar, less than the cost of a candy bar.
- Close to one-third (34%) of stores sold non- or low-fat milk, yet nearly all (93%) sell alcohol.
- Tobacco chew is sold at 73% of stores, yet just 65% sell even a small selection of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in Mariposa County in stores from 29% in 2013 up to 42% for the 2016 survey.

“The expanded availability of e-cigarettes are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in our county in the last three years,” said Ginnie Day-Nash, Public Health Educator for Mariposa County.

Another goal was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth.

“The amount of kid-friendly flavored tobacco and alcohol products, the location of unhealthy products within our stores and the type of unhealthy advertising left no doubt in my mind that young people are being targeted. As adults, we become somewhat desensitized to this advertising. But our kids are more vulnerable to marketing. We need to change this and surround our youth with messaging that encourage choices for a healthier lifestyle, now and on into adulthood,” said Day-Nash

The survey found the following for Mariposa County:

- Only 15% of stores advertised healthy products on their storefront, while 50% of storefronts advertised unhealthy products.
- More than 23% of stores place tobacco products or ads in kid-friendly locations, such as tobacco ads at ‘kid-level’ (three feet or below) or tobacco products near candy or toys.
- 73% of stores sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, which often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate, gummy candies and even breakfast cereals.

Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community is a statewide campaign formed by tobacco prevention, nutrition, alcohol abuse prevention and STD prevention partners collaborating to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impact of unhealthy product availability and marketing in the retail environment.

Mariposa County Health Department is committed to continuing our work with local health advocates and partners to provide accurate information and help make the healthy choice the easy choice for residents and visitors.

For state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com.

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