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## E-cigarettes up, sugary drinks down in Madera County

April 1, 2017 | Mark Evan Smith of Sierra Star

Stores throughout Madera County have a higher selection of fresh fruit and vegetables than they did three years ago, but also sell more tobacco-related products, including a 37 percent increase in the availability of electronic smoking devices, according to recent results from a statewide survey.

Through the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign, data indicated that of the 128 stores surveyed in Madera County — including supermarkets, pharmacies, convenience and liquor stores, as well as tobacco-only stores — 32.1 percent sold electronic smoking devices in 2013. That number jumped to 69.4 percent in 2016.

"Overall, the findings show a continuing and alarming discrepancy in our county in the accessibility and marketing between products that promote a healthy lifestyle, and those that don't," said Alan Gilmore, a program manager with the Madera County Public Health Department. "The expanded availability of e-cigarettes are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last three years."

Since 2013, the availability of tobacco products rose in every category. Chewing tobacco rose from 63.3 to 72.7 percent, little cigars/cigarillos 85.3 to 90.1 percent, single cigars/cigarillos 57.8 to 75.2 percent, and flavored non-cigarette tobacco products from 81.7 to 91.7 percent.

On the positive end, stores that offer fresh fruits or vegetables also rose from 38.5 to 52.1 percent, and only 54.5 percent of them offer sugary drinks at check-out stands, compared to 70.6 percent in 2013.

"There's an indication that stores can make changes in the interest of public health, and still stay viable and keep their doors open," Gilmore said. "We're really interested in extending ourselves to the retail community, to see how we can work on changing the dynamics of some of these issues so we can make positive changes for public health while they stay them in business. We want them to stay viable, but we also want them to be able to increase the availability of healthier options to help increase sales."

Stores that sell alcohol also slightly decreased, from 88.1 to 86.8 percent.

Another troublesome area, though, was the rise in tobacco and alcohol-related advertising.

In particular, alcohol-related advertising near candy or toys, and at "kid level" (below three feet), jumped from 26 to 66.7 percent. And though no data was taken in 2013, in 2016, 52.1 percent of stores now offer tobacco marketing in "kid-friendly locations," including 61.9 percent of stores that have it near schools, according to the survey.

"This survey found that our community's youth are inundated with unhealthy messages and choices," Gilmore said. "We need to change that information and options our kids are exposed to, and work to surround them with healthy choices and messaging instead."

Among the survey's findings:

- 11 percent of stores advertised healthy products on their storefronts, compared to 79% that advertised unhealthy products.
- 88 percent sell condoms, but only 57 percent sell them on unlocked shelves.
- 100 percent of stores near schools sell flavored tobacco products.

More information is available online at [healthystoreshealthycommunity.com](http://healthystoreshealthycommunity.com).

Gilmore said the public health department will work to get that information out to the public, then take their feedback back to public officials like the Madera County Board of Supervisors on possible ways to help make healthier choices more available to the public.

The Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community survey was administered to 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties. It 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.

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*For more from journalist Mark Smith, visit the [Sierra Star website](#).*

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