

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:**

**Debra Kelley**

**Debra.kelley@lung.org**

**Cell: 619-972-5008**

**Office: 619.683.7519**



**WHAT'S IN STORE FOR OUR KIDS: GOOD HEALTH, OR ADDICTION AND EARLY DEATH?**

**New Survey Shows Sharp Increase in Availability of E-Cigarettes in San Diego County  
Kids Still Bombarded with Tobacco and Alcohol Ads and Products, Especially in Stores Near Schools**

San Diego, CA (March 8, 2017) – New research shows that in San Diego County the availability of e-cigarettes has jumped 30% since 2013. This finding is part of new research released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco. The availability of condoms to prevent sexually transmissible diseases was assessed for the first time. A major goal of the survey was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth.

Today, health advocates held over a dozen press events in communities statewide to release results of the scientific survey, which is the largest of its kind. It builds upon initial research released in March 2014 and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of the products during this time. Information was collected in the summer of 2016 from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 counties including pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores as well as tobacco-only stores. Three hundred forty-seven (347) stores were surveyed in San Diego County.

“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 Dr. Eunice Sanchez-Mata, Board Member, American Heart Association San Diego Division.

Flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, such as Swisher Sweets, e-cigarettes, and chew, are especially popular among kids, and are sold in 80.6% of all stores. Moreover, the percentage of stores selling e-cigarettes increased from 54.3% in 2013 to 70.6% in 2016.

“The expanded availability of e-cigarettes is of particular concern and reflects the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last three years,” said Debra Kelley, Advocacy Director, American Lung Association in California – San Diego Office.

Parents might hope that stores located near schools would offer healthier products and advertising. However, stores located within 1,000 feet of schools were as likely, or more likely than other stores to have unhealthy storefront ads, as well as tobacco products and tobacco marketing that are especially appealing to kids.

“Participating in the survey opened my eyes to what’s really in our stores,” said Bree Gray, volunteer data collector, graduate student and concerned mother. “I want my children to lead long, healthy lives. I am worried about my kids’ exposure to so many unhealthy products and ads.”

Additionally, the survey found:

- Of retailers that sell Swisher Sweets, 100% of stores near schools sell the product for less than \$1.00, compared to 87.7% of stores in general.
- 79.6% of stores near schools have unhealthy storefront ads, compared to 70.6% of stores in general
- 79.6% of stores near schools sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, nearly the same as 80.6% of stores in general.
- 55.1% of stores near schools have tobacco marketing in kid-friendly locations, compared to 60.0% of all stores.
- 70.6% of storefronts advertise unhealthy products, but only 17.5% of stores advertise healthy products on their storefronts.
- In addition to selling cigarettes, 73.8% of stores sell “little cigars” or cigarillos, but only 41.3% of stores sell fresh fruits or vegetables.
- 70.6% of stores sell alcohol, but only 38.1% of stores sell non- or low-fat milk.

“Stores play a critical role in our community’s health, and this survey shows available products and messaging are out of balance, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options,” said Elle Mari, Director, Urban Food Environments, University of California, San Diego. “Our goal is to help re-calibrate the balance toward health in our retail environments.”

In 2016, the survey assessed the availability of “alcopops” – sweet fruit- or candy-flavored alcohol products that are especially appealing to younger customers. The survey found that among stores that sell alcohol, 61.2% sell “alcopops”. Additionally, 33.7% of stores place alcohol ads at “kid-level” or near kid-friendly items such as candy or toys.

“This survey found that our community’s youth are inundated with unhealthy messages and choices. We need to change what information and options our kids are exposed to and work to surround them with healthy choices and messaging instead,” said Dana Stevens, Executive Director, Community, Action, Service and Advocacy.

Easy access to condoms is important to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, which are now at a 20-year high in San Diego County. The survey collected data on the availability and accessibility of condoms. The good news is that 77.8% of surveyed stores sell condoms. The disappointing news is only 36.1% sell them on unlocked shelves.

*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.

For state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit [www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com/counties/San-Diego](http://www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com/counties/San-Diego)

# # #