Customers smoke e-cigarettes at Beyond Vape, a store in New York on April 16, 2015. **Michael Appleton** - The New York Times

LOCAL

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'Alarming' results found in health survey of SLO County

BY MEGAN HENNEY
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New survey findings released Wednesday show an "alarming" discrepancy between access to unhealthy and healthy products in some San Luis Obispo County stores, said Dr. Penny Borenstein, the county's public health officer.

For instance, the number of stores that sell electronic cigarettes in San Luis Obispo County has spiked about 29 percent since 2013, according to a survey conducted by Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community — a statewide campaign by tobacco prevention, nutrition, alcohol abuse prevention, and STD prevention partners to improve the health of Californians.

The survey took a county-by-county look at the availability of unhealthy foods, alcohol, condoms and the type of storefront advertisements in businesses that sell tobacco — including supermarkets, delis, pharmacies and convenience stores.

"This survey shows offerings and messaging are out of balance, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options," Borenstein said. "Our goal is to help recalibrate the balance toward health."

While 92 percent of stores selling tobacco in San Luis Obispo County sell "little cigars," only 60 percent sell fresh fruit or vegetables, according to the survey. And while 81 percent of those stores sold alcohol, only 28 percent offered non- or low-fat milk.

14.8 Percent of San Luis Obispo County youths who use tobacco

13.8 Percent of youths statewide who use tobacco

The study also examined access children have to unhealthy products and found that 67 percent of stores advertised unhealthy products on their storefronts, compared with 14 percent of stores that chose to advertise healthy products instead. More than 94 percent of stores sell flavored tobacco products — often created with "kid-appealing" flavors such as grape, watermelon and chocolate, according to the survey.

"We need to change what information and options our kids are exposed to," Borenstein said, "and work to surround them with healthy choices and messaging instead."

The survey also compared the county to statewide statistics using several health-related indicators.

The rate of cigarette smoking among adults in San Luis Obispo County is similar statewide, at 12.5 percent, although the rate of tobacco use by youths is 14.8 percent in the county compared with 13.8 percent statewide.

Teen drinking rates are higher in the county, with 38 percent of 11th-graders consuming alcohol before age 15 compared with 29 percent statewide; 28 percent of 11th-graders in the county binge drink compared with 18 percent across the state.

Additionally, 18 percent of adults in San Luis Obispo County can't always find fresh produce in their neighborhood compared with 23.4 percent statewide. And 55.2 percent of adults in the county are overweight or obese compared with 62.5 percent statewide, according to the survey.

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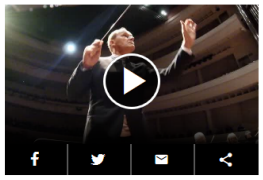

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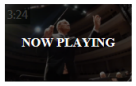

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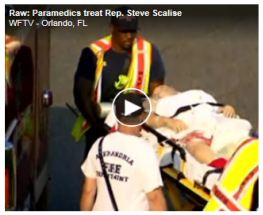

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Natalie Fertig - McClatchy

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