

Study shows big tobacco targeting youth with e-cigarettes, flavored products

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In this July 7, 2015, file photo, Will Braaten exhales vapor from an e-cigarette at the Vapor Spot in Sacramento. In the past three years, the availability of e-cigs in California has increased by 68 percent, according to a new survey.

A scientific study of more than 7,100 retail stores across California reveals big tobacco is marketing to what it hopes is its next generation of smokers: today's youth.

"We need to get the message out our youth are being targeted," Dr. Charity Dean, Santa Barbara County Public Health Officer, said Wednesday morning during a news briefing on the findings from the survey conducted last year.

Dean noted the survey shows that of the 200 retail stores surveyed in [Santa Barbara County](#), 52 percent had tobacco marketing in kid-friendly locations, such as places where candy also was sold.

"This is not an accident," she said. "As a health care provider and a parent, it's a very worrisome trend."

The survey was the largest of its kind and is part of the state's "Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community" statewide collaboration between tobacco-use prevention, nutrition and alcohol-prevention partners. The last survey was taken in 2013.

The goal is to "improve the health of Californians through changes in community stores and to educate people how in-store product marketing influences consumption of unhealthy products."

Numbers in the most recent survey show in the past three years, the availability of electronic cigarettes has increased by 68 percent. Health care providers say that figure is troubling given that local youth surveys show that, on average, 14 percent of high-school-aged teens use electronic smoking devices.

"That's a significant spike," Dean said.

Studies indicate youth who use electronic smoking devices such as e-cigarettes are 2 to 8 percent more likely to begin smoking traditional cigarettes within a year.

"It's very clear to me (with the marketing) that the industry is stretching the limits to market to children," said [Ventura County](#) Public Health Department Director Rigoberto Vargas. "They need replacement smokers."

San Luis Obispo County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein said the numbers for her county were very similar to those of Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, with the exception being that the survey revealed 100 percent of stores near schools in [San Luis Obispo County](#) sell flavored tobacco products.

"We top the cake on that one," Borenstein said. "The outreach is real to get these products into the hands of our kids. It's very purposeful. This new attempt to hook a new generation of smokers is very disturbing."

The survey shows three out of four stores in Santa Barbara County sell cheap, flavored youth-targeted tobacco products, with flavors such as grape, chocolate and gummy candy.

Results of the survey also revealed 40 percent of the county's stores sell fresh fruit and vegetables, while 80 percent sell flavored tobacco. The 40 percent was a 14-percent decrease from 2013, according to the survey.

For more information about the survey and "Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community," visit <http://healthystoreshealthycommunity.com/>

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