



Survey finds county stores sell and advertise 'unhealthy products'

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New research shows that the availability of e-cigarettes in Yolo County has grown 60 percent since 2013.

This finding is part of new research released by the California Tobacco Control Program Wednesday on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

According to Yolo County Public Information Office Beth Gabor, 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 the availability and marketing of the studied products," Gabor stated. "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, and tobacco-only stores.

"The findings show that many stores throughout Yolo County are promoting unhealthy products much more than healthy products," said Yolo County Health Officer Dr. Ron Chapman. "Stores play an important role in people's health, and we encourage stores to consider selling and advertising healthy products, such as fresh fruits and vegetables."

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

"This survey found that our youth are regularly exposed to unhealthy messages and choices," said Chapman. "Children and youth need to see more messages about healthy choices which will have a positive influence on their health for the rest of their lives."

The survey found the following for Yolo County:

- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in Yolo County stores with 73 percent carrying them in 2016, up from 46 percent in 2013.
- 84 percent of stores sold "little cigars" or cigarillos. Of the stores that sold a popular brand of "little cigars" — which come in kid-friendly flavors such as grape, strawberry and chocolate — 80 percent sold

... They come in all kinds of flavors such as grape, strawberry, and chocolate – 80 percent sold them individually for less than one dollar.

- 80 percent of stores sold flavored tobacco products and 75 percent of those stores were located near schools.

- More than 32 percent of stores placed tobacco products or ads in kid-friendly locations, such as at ‘kid-level’ (three feet or below) or near candy and toys.

“The expanded availability and marketing of e-cigarettes and flavored tobacco products are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last three years,” said Chapman. “A recent ban on the sale of flavored tobacco products in the unincorporated cities is one of the latest steps that Yolo County has taken to protect youth from tobacco use.”

Along with the availability of tobacco products, the survey also looked at availability and marketing of fresh fruits and vegetables, sugar-sweetened beverages, and healthy beverages, alcohol and condoms.

The survey found the following for Yolo County:

- Only 19 percent of stores advertised healthy products on their storefronts, but 67 percent advertised unhealthy products.

- 29 percent of stores placed alcohol ads at “kid-level” or near kid-friendly items. This percent did decrease from 2013 when nearly 70 percent of stores had alcohol ads in kid-friendly areas.

- Alcopops – flavored alcohol products often made to look like juices, sodas or energy drinks – were sold in 80 percent of stores.

- Over 50 percent of stores placed sugar-sweetened beverages such as sodas near the checkout stand. In contrast, only 41 percent of stores carried fresh fruits and vegetables or low- or non-fat milk anywhere in the store.

- 80 percent of stores sold condoms, but only 59 percent sold them on unlocked shelves.

Last year, Yolo supervisors worked on banning the sale of flavored tobacco products in the unincorporated areas of the county .

The ordinance was put forth to address a loophole in the FDA’s 2009 ban of flavored cigarettes to apply to all flavored tobacco products. This was one in a series of county efforts to crack down on tobacco use amongst area youth. In 2015, the Board passed a countywide ban on e-cigarettes.

Proponents of the ban argued that flavored tobacco products are intended to make tobacco more appealing to youth by improving their taste, smell, and appearance. They come in colorful packaging and in such flavors as watermelon, cotton candy, bubble gum and gummy bears.

Though many residents came forward urging the Board to pass the ban, rural convenience store owners felt that the ordinance would unfairly penalize them and hurt their businesses.

They argued that the ordinance is no longer necessary since the state passed a law prohibiting anyone under the age of 21 to buy tobacco products and, in the past five years, only one of these rural businesses has been written up for selling tobacco to minors.

Madison convenience store owner Parminder Singh asserted that, because the ordinance would only affect rural businesses, people would simply drive to stores within the cities to get their products – hurting rural businesses and not preventing people from buying tobacco.



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