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Local News

Study shows increase in e-cigarette marketing and access in Yolo County

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy From page A6 | March 10, 2017

The availability of e-cigarettes in Yolo County has grown 60 percent since 2013, according to research released by the California Tobacco Control Program this week.

That research looked at the availability and marketing of not just tobacco products, but also alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

The research included data collected last summer 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,” Chapman said. “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 produced the following findings 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 them individually for less than \$1.

* 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,” Chapman said.

“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, 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 percentage 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.

More than 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 nonfat milk anywhere in the store.

* 80 percent of stores sold condoms, but only 59 percent sold 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, visit <http://www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com>.