



ENFORCING LAWS PROHIBITING CIGARETTE SALES TO KIDS REDUCES YOUTH SMOKING

Strictly enforcing laws prohibiting tobacco sales to minors reduces youth smoking and is an important component of any comprehensive tobacco prevention campaign. While every state forbids retail sales to minors, these restrictions are often not enforced; and efforts by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to reduce cigarette sales to youths were stopped by the U.S. Supreme Court and cannot be restored without Congressional action. Failing to enforce minimum-age laws not only wastes a constructive opportunity to reduce youth smoking but also tells kids that the laws need not be taken seriously -- which undermines other tobacco-reduction efforts in the media, schools, and communities.

It's Too Easy for Kids to Buy Cigarettes

Each year, kids smoke more than 800 million packs of cigarettes, resulting in almost half a billion dollars in cigarette company profits – and the vast majority of these cigarettes are illegally sold to kids.¹ Despite improvements in state efforts to stop retailer sales of tobacco products to youth, 15 percent of all 9th to 12th graders who smoke *usually* buy their cigarettes directly from a store, and others do so less frequently. Of these sales to youth smokers, nearly half (48.5%) of them were not asked to show proof of age when purchasing cigarettes.² Not surprisingly, 58 percent of 8th graders and 80 percent of 10th graders say that cigarettes are fairly or very easy to get.³

Efforts to reduce illegal cigarette sales to kids can have a direct impact on roughly three-quarters or more of all cigarettes smoked by kids. Besides those youth who buy directly, about 25 percent of kids report that they usually give money to other kids or adults to buy for them, and a third or more usually borrow their cigarettes from others (typically from kids who buy them directly). In addition, the heaviest and most regular youth smokers are the most likely to buy cigarettes directly from stores, and to supply cigarettes to other youths.⁴

Enforcement of Youth Access Laws Reduces Tobacco Sales to Minors

Studies show that effectively enforcing laws against cigarette sales to kids through regular compliance checks and penalizing retailers that sell to kids can significantly reduce youth smoking.⁵ In contrast, voluntary retailer compliance programs, such as those promoted by the big cigarette companies, do not.⁶

- A study published in the *Annals of Family Medicine* found that youth who perceived cigarettes as relatively easy to get were more likely to become regular smokers than those who perceived cigarettes as more difficult to obtain.⁷
- A Canadian study examining tobacco retailers surrounding schools found that retailer density is linked to youth access. It concluded that selective enforcement of youth access laws in retail outlets close to schools may help prevent underage youth from smoking.⁸
- A study done in Chicago in 2006 found that tobacco retailers were disproportionately located in areas with lower social and economic levels. It also found that youths in areas with a higher density of tobacco retailers were 13 percent more likely to have smoked in the past month than youths living in areas with lower tobacco retail density. This suggests that reductions in retail tobacco outlet density may reduce rates of youth smoking.⁹
- A 2004 study conducted in California contrasted youth manipulative behavior with retailer behavior in contributing to underage tobacco sales. The results showed that retailer behavior was the strongest predictor of cigarettes sales to youth and reiterated the need for intervention with retailers.¹⁰
- By analyzing FDA compliance checks across the country, a 2003 study found that state policies significantly affect the sale of tobacco products to minors. Stores located in states with fewer/weaker compliance policy measures were 36 percent more likely to illegally sell tobacco to minors than stores located in states with more effective measures.¹¹

- A study of 14 Minnesota communities in the *American Journal of Public Health* showed that an intervention involving local ordinances and enforcement to limit youth access to tobacco significantly reduced adolescent smoking rates.¹²
- A 1997 study analyzing youth access policies, compliance, and enforcement concluded that aggressive and comprehensive approaches to limiting youth access will lead to significant reductions in youth smoking.¹³
- A *Journal of American Medical Association* study found that a comprehensive youth access program in Woodridge, Illinois, reduced sales to minors from 70 percent to less than 5 percent in a year and a half, while reducing tobacco use among youth by over 50 percent.¹⁴
- Comprehensive tobacco prevention programs in California and Massachusetts that included strong enforcement of youth access laws substantially reduced illegal sales to minors. In California, the proportion of retailers who failed compliance checks for selling tobacco products to minors decreased from 52 percent in 1994 to 21.7 percent in 1997.¹⁵ In Massachusetts, illegal retailer sales dropped from 48 to eight percent.¹⁶ After Massachusetts slashed its tobacco control funding and sharply curtailed its periodic retailer compliance checks, however, the average rate of illegal sales to minors in that state more than tripled.¹⁷

Cigarette Company Voluntary Youth Access Programs Do Not Work

To block the rigorous enforcement of effective federal, state, or local laws to prevent illegal sales of tobacco products to youth, the tobacco industry regularly claims that its own voluntary “anti-youth-access” programs will adequately protect against such sales to kids. But those voluntary programs are inherently flawed, have never been implemented effectively, and have never functioned properly to reduce youth access to tobacco products or stop illegal cigarette sales to kids.¹⁸ For example, one study found that tobacco product retail stores with “We Card” signs had average youth sales rates roughly equal to those stores with no signs at all, and were significantly more likely to make illegal sales to minors than those retail outlets with government-sponsored signs about no tobacco product sales to youths.¹⁹

Key Elements of an Enforcement Program

Based on solid research findings, state attorneys general and other experts have recommended that any effort to reduce youth access to tobacco products include the following key elements:

- Designating an agency with clear responsibility for enforcement
- Providing adequate, guaranteed funding for enforcement
- Making frequent and realistic compliance checks, with a goal of sustained 95 percent compliance
- Meaningful penalties including graduated fines and ultimately, prohibiting sales of tobacco products
- No preemption of local ordinances
- Education and awareness efforts for merchants and the public.²⁰

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Related Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Factsheets (<http://tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets>)

- ***Penalizing Kids for Buying, Possessing, or Smoking Cigarettes***
- ***Where do Youth Smokers Get Their Cigarettes?***
- ***Cigarette Company Youth Access Initiatives: Fake and Ineffective***
- ***A Long History of Empty Promises: The Cigarette Companies' Youth Anti-Smoking Programs***

¹ DiFranza, J. & J. Librett, “State and Federal Revenues from Tobacco Consumed by Minors,” *American Journal of Public Health* 89(7): 1106-1108 (July 1999); Cummings, et al., “The Illegal Sale of Cigarettes to US Minors: Estimates by State,” *American Journal of Public Health* 84:300-302 (1994).

- ² U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2005*, *CDC Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 55:SS-5 (July 9, 2006), <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/ss/ss5505.pdf>.
- ³ Johnson, L.D., et al., *Decline in Daily Smoking by Younger Teens Has Ended*, December 21, 2006, University of Michigan News and Information Services: Ann Arbor, MI, <http://monitoringthefuture.org>.
- ⁴ U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1999*, *CDC Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 49:SS-5 (July 9, 2000), ; CDC, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1997*, *CDC Surveillance Summaries, MMWR* 47:SS-3 (August 14, 1998), http://www2.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_ss.html, and underlying data. See, also, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, "Where Do Youth Smokers Get Their Cigarettes," <http://tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0073.pdf>.
- ⁵ See, e.g., Stead, L. & T. Lancaster, "Interventions for preventing tobacco sales to minors," *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* (1), January 25, 2005 [update of prior research review]. Stead, L. & T. Lancaster, "A Systematic Review of Interventions for Preventing Tobacco Sales to Minors," *Tobacco Control* 9: 169-176 (Summer, 2000) [a review of the research to date], <http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/2/169>.
- ⁶ See, e.g., Cowling, D & D Robbins, "Rates of Illegal Tobacco Sales to Minors Varies by Sign Type in California," Research Letter, *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(11): 1792-93, November 2000. Stead & Lancaster (Summer 2000); DiFranza, J.R., et al., "Youth Access to Tobacco: the Effects of Age, Gender, and "It's the Law" Programs," *American Journal of Public Health* 86(2): 221-24 (February 1996); Feighery, E., et al., "The Effects of Combining Education and Enforcement to Reduce Tobacco Sales to Minors." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 266:22:3168-3171 (December 11, 1991); Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, *A Long History of Empty Promises: The Cigarette Companies' Youth Anti-Smoking Programs*, <http://tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0010.pdf>.
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- ¹⁶ Abt Associates, Inc., *Independent Evaluation of the Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program: Fourth Annual Report, January 1994 to June 1997* (1998). See, also, Rigotti N.A., et al. "The Effect of Enforcing Tobacco-Sales Laws on Adolescents' Access to Tobacco and Smoking Behavior." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 337:15:1044-1051 (October 9, 1997).
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- ¹⁸ See also Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Fact Sheet, "Cigarette Company Youth Access Initiatives: Fake and Ineffective," (2005), www.tobaccofreekids.org.
- ¹⁹ Cowling, D & D Robbins, "Rates of Illegal Tobacco Sales to Minors Varies by Sign Type in California," Research Letter, *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(11): 1792-93, November 2000.
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