



WHERE DO YOUTH SMOKERS GET THEIR CIGARETTES?

More than half of all youth smokers usually buy the cigarettes they smoke, either directly from retailers or vending machines, from other kids, or by giving money to others to buy for them. Roughly a third typically get their cigarettes from others (usually other kids) for free, and a small but significant percentage of kids obtain their cigarettes by shoplifting or other stealing. But where and how youth smokers get their cigarettes can vary considerably from state to state or city to city depending on such factors as whether the jurisdiction strictly enforces the laws prohibiting tobacco sales to minors, requires retailers to keep cigarettes behind the counter, or has banned cigarette vending machines or restricted them to adult-only locations.

Nationwide, older youth smokers are more likely to buy their cigarettes directly than younger smokers, who are more likely to get their cigarettes from others or by stealing. Some of this difference is explained by older kids typically finding it easier to buy cigarettes than younger kids. But another powerful factor is that older youth smokers are more likely to be daily or regular users and regular or heavy smokers in all youth age groups are much more likely to purchase their own cigarettes than kids who smoke less frequently or are only "experimenting." Not surprisingly, the older or more regular youth smokers who buy their own cigarettes are also major suppliers of kids who do not purchase their own cigarettes but get them from others.

Because of these purchasing and consumption patterns, the roughly half of all youth smokers who regularly buy their own cigarettes personally consume considerably more than half of all youth-smoked cigarettes. They also supply a substantial portion of the cigarettes smoked by those youth smokers who typically buy or borrow their cigarettes from others. As a result, it is likely that roughly three quarters or more of all cigarettes consumed by kids are purchased by kids -- which is why strictly enforcing laws forbidding retailer sales to kids and raising cigarette prices through tax increases can quickly and significantly reduce youth smoking.

Research On How Kids Obtain Cigarettes

The 2006 *Monitoring the Future* survey found that 58 percent of 8th graders and 80 percent of 10th graders said cigarettes were easy for them to get.¹

The 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found that among 12 to 17 year olds who had smoked in the last month, more than three out of five (77%) had purchased their own cigarettes. More than half (53.3%) had directly purchased their own cigarettes, six out of ten (63.3%) had given money to others to buy cigarettes for them, three out of ten (30.5%) had purchased cigarettes from a friend, family member, or someone at school, and a small portion purchased cigarettes over the Internet or through the mail (2.6% and 2.9%, respectively). In addition, six out of ten (62%) had "bummed" cigarettes from others and more than one of ten (13.1%) had taken cigarettes from others without asking, with just under one percent (0.8%) had stolen cigarettes from a store. Older underage smokers were more likely to buy directly in stores than younger smokers. While there have been more recent NSDUH surveys, no questions on youth access have been asked since 2003.²

The 2007 national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) survey of 9th to 12th graders by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 16.0 percent directly purchased their cigarettes from stores or gas stations, with a quarter of all 12th graders making such direct purchases.³ While the 2007 YRBS did not provide any additional detail, an earlier YRBS showed that 54.5 percent of those who had smoked in the past 30 days usually purchased their cigarettes directly from a store (23.5%), from vending machines (1.1%), or by giving money to others to make their purchases (29.9%). 30.4 percent usually borrowed their cigarettes from others and 4.4 percent usually stole their cigarettes. In addition, older kids and kids of any age who were daily smokers were much more likely to buy their cigarettes directly from stores than younger or infrequent smokers. No data was provided on the percentage buying their cigarettes from other kids.⁴

The 2000 national Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) found that among high school smokers, 32.2 percent usually obtained their cigarettes by purchasing them from a store and 25.1 percent usually gave someone else money to buy cigarettes for them – with 20.9 percent borrowing the cigarettes from others and 2.9

Where Do Youth Smokers Get Their Cigarettes? / 2

percent taking them from a store or family members.⁵ The 2000 YTS also found that 57.1 percent of high school smokers who have purchased cigarettes purchased their last pack of cigarettes by purchasing it from a gas station, 26.3 percent from a convenience store, and 7.7 percent from a grocery store. No data was provided on the percentage buying their cigarettes from other kids. No additional YTS data on the specific sources of cigarettes for youth as been released since the 2000 YTS. But the 2004 YTS showed that 70.6 percent of middle school smokers said that they were not asked to show proof of age when trying to buy cigarettes from a store. 66.4 percent said they were not refused purchase of cigarettes due to their age.⁶

A 2006 study conducted in the Memphis city school system found that even among 11 and 12 year-old seventh-graders, 11 percent were able to purchase their cigarettes from stores. In addition, 30 percent got their cigarettes from friends, six percent from vending machines, and 17 percent stole them.⁷

Making it More Costly or Difficult For Kids to Buy Cigarettes Reduces Youth Smoking

Numerous research studies have found that making obtaining cigarettes as inconvenient, difficult, and expensive as possible for kids not only reduces the number of kids who try or regularly smoke cigarettes, but also reduces the number of cigarettes consumed by kids who continue to smoke. Because youth purchases are the major source of cigarettes smoked by kids, increasing cigarette prices and minimizing the number of retailers willing to illegally sell cigarettes to kids have each been shown to reduce youth smoking.⁸ While these measures directly affect youths who buy their own cigarettes, they also reduce the number of kids who buy cigarettes and supply them to other kids for free. Price hikes may also make it less likely that parents and other adults will give cigarettes to kids, be as careless about leaving their cigarettes where children can easily take them, or not notice when some of their cigarettes are missing.

In contrast to retail-enforcement efforts, voluntary tobacco industry programs to reduce illegal retailer sales to kids have not been found to reduce youth sales effectively.⁹ Similarly, while total bans of vending machine cigarette sales will eliminate that source, kids still readily obtain cigarettes from vending machines in those jurisdictions that restrict vending machine sales to adult-only locations or otherwise regulate vending machine sales without eliminating them.¹⁰

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, December 14, 2009, Jessica Kuehne

Related Fact Sheets From the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org>)

- *Raising Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking, Especially Among Kids (& the Cigarette Companies Know It)*
- *Enforcing Laws Prohibiting Tobacco Sales to Minors Reduces Youth Smoking Rates*
- *Penalizing Kids for Buying, Possessing, or Smoking Cigarettes*
- *A Long History of Empty Promises: The Cigarette Companies' Youth Anti-Smoking Programs*

¹ Johnston, L. D. et al., *Monitoring the Future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of key findings, 2006* (NIH Publication No. 07-6202) National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2007.

² Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services, *2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, September 9, 2004, <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NHSDA/2k3NSDUH/2k3results.htm#ch4>
<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda.htm#NHSDAinfo>.

³ CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2007," *MMWR* 57(SS-4), June 6, 2008
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5704.pdf>.

⁴ CDC, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1999, CDC Surveillance Summaries, MMWR* 49:SS-5, July 9, 2000, http://www2.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_ss.html.

⁵ CDC, *Youth Tobacco Surveillance – United States, 2000, CDC Surveillance Summaries, MMWR* 50:SS-4, November 2, 2001, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5004a1.htm>.

⁶ CDC, *Youth Tobacco Surveillance – United States, 2004, CDC Surveillance Summaries, MMWR* 54:SS-12, April 1, 2005, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5412a1.htm>

⁷ Robinson, LA, et al., "Changes in Adolescents' Sources of Cigarettes," *Jnl of Adolescent Health*, 39:861-867, 2006.

⁸ See the related Campaign factsheets listed above, and the many cited references therein.

⁹ See, e.g., 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); and the related Campaign fact sheet listed above.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Forster, J.L., et al., "Availability of Cigarettes to Underage Youth in Three Communities," *Preventive Medicine* 21(3): 320-28 (May 1992); Kolpien, K.A. & M.T. Lippert, "Compliance with Wisconsin Statute 134.66 Regulating Cigarette Vending Machines, Wood County, Wisc., 1993-95," *Wisconsin Medical Journal* 94(11): 621-24 (November 1995); Forster, J.L., et al., "Locking Devices on Cigarette Vending Machines: Evaluation of a City Ordinance," *Am. Jnl of Public Health* 82(9): 1217-19, September 1992.