



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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California Survey Sees Lower Rate of Illegal Tobacco Sales to Minors in 2015

Rates still remain high in specialized tobacco retail outlets

SACRAMENTO – California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Director and State Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith announced today that a survey has found that the California rate of illegal tobacco sales to minors has decreased. According to the [2015 Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey](#), illegal tobacco sales to minors at retail outlets occurred at a rate of 7.6 percent, compared to last year's rate of 9 percent.

When the state first started monitoring illegal sales of tobacco in 1997, teens participating in the survey were able to buy tobacco products during 21.7 percent of tobacco purchase attempts.

“For seven consecutive years, the rate of illegal tobacco sales to minors has remained under 10 percent. However, the Healthy People 2020 target is to reduce this to 5 percent or less which indicates that California still has room for considerable progress. I'm concerned that too many stores, especially certain types such as tobacco-only stores and convenience stores, are willing to illegally sell tobacco products to youth,” Smith said.

Notably, stores specializing in the sale of tobacco products, commonly known as tobacco-only stores, had the highest illegal sales rate, with 14.8 percent in 2015. Other stores with high rates of illegal tobacco sales include:

- Convenience stores without gas (9.5 percent)
- Convenience stores that sell gasoline (8.8 percent)
- Less common retail outlets, such as discount and gift stores, gas stations without convenience stores and car washes (8.6 percent)

The difference between the rate of sales at non-traditional tobacco retail stores and the rate at more traditional retailers continues to narrow, and is only separated by 0.2 percentage points (7.7 percent vs. 7.5 percent, respectively).

Supermarkets and drug stores/pharmacies had the lowest rate of illegal sales at 3.9 percent and 0 percent, respectively.

(more)

This annual survey of illegal sales of cigarettes to minors is conducted to gauge the rate of illegal tobacco sales across California and to comply with the Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement (STAKE) Act. All U.S. states and territories are required to assess their rate of illegal sales of tobacco to youth, pursuant to the Federal Synar Amendment. Besides conducting the annual survey, the California Department of Public Health, Food and Drug Branch, conducts ongoing illegal sales compliance checks. The survey of 733 stores throughout the state is conducted by monitoring more than 100 youth who are sent to retail outlets to attempt to purchase tobacco products. California retailers caught selling tobacco products to minors during these enforcement operations may be subject to fines up to \$6,000 for repeated violations.

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