



# SAN BENITO COUNTY

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## **New Survey shows San Benito County needs a better balance of healthy and accessible products in stores that help make the healthy choice the easy choice**

Hollister, CA – June 2020 – New research shows that in San Benito County the availability of flavored non-cigarette tobacco products has increased from 70.3% in 2016 to 84.6% in 2019 among surveyed stores. Furthermore, of the surveyed stores located near schools, 100% sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products. These widely available products come in hundreds of enticing flavors, and can be sold individually – making them very appealing to youth. These findings are part of new research released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

The Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community (HSHC) Survey is the largest scientific survey of its kind in the state and builds upon previous research released in 2014 and 2017 to look at changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products over time. Information collected from nearly 8,000 randomly selected licensed tobacco retailers in all 58 California counties included convenience, gas, grocery, liquor, and drug, as well as tobacco stores.

One of the key goals of the survey was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth. In San Benito County, 38.5% of surveyed stores still have tobacco marketing in kid-friendly locations, such as near candy or toys or under three feet.

“The findings show that while we have made some progress in combatting tobacco, our community’s youth are still surrounded by unhealthy choices and messages in the retail environment,” said Samela Perez, Project Director and Public Information Officer. “Tobacco advertising shouldn’t be somewhere that’s meant to be seen by kids. Overall, we need a better balance of healthy choices in our stores. This information is important to examine because the three leading causes of death in California are from heart disease, cancer and stroke – we can largely prevent them by eliminating tobacco use, limiting alcohol use, eating healthy and being physically active.”

**The survey found the following for San Benito County:**

- 84.6% of stores surveyed sell flavored, non-cigarette tobacco products such as grape e-cigarettes, which is an increase from 70.3% in 2016. A majority of stores (84.6%) also sold menthol cigarettes.
- The majority of stores surveyed had unhealthy storefront advertising (84.6%). Of these stores located near schools 100% had unhealthy storefront advertising.

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- The percent of stores selling little cigars/cigarillos significantly increased from 2016 (54.1%) to 2019 (84.6%).
- More than 23.1% of surveyed stores in San Benito County sold sugary drinks at the check-out counter. California teens consume the equivalent of 39 pounds of sugar each year from sugary drinks.
- Of the surveyed stores that sold alcohol, 80% were found to sell alcopops. These are alcoholic beverages that come in sweet and fruity flavors that can be appealing to kids.
- 61.5% of surveyed stores sold condoms, but only 15.4% sold them on unlocked shelves where people don't have to worry about being embarrassed by asking a clerk to access them. This is important because California saw a significant increase in bacterial STDs (chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis) in 2018.

“The continued/growing availability of flavored tobacco products are of particular concern as four out of five youth who have used tobacco started with a flavored product. Flavors are the tobacco industry’s recruitment tool to hook new customers,” said Samela Perez. “San Benito County is committed to continuing to work with local health advocates and partners to provide accurate information and help make the healthy choice the easy choice for Californians. We have an important opportunity, now, to make sure our stores offer healthier options.”

The Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign is a statewide collaboration between tobacco and alcohol use prevention, sexually transmitted disease prevention, and nutrition partners to examine what’s in our community stores and how that impacts public health.

For full state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit [www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com](http://www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com).

Alcopops\*are bottled alcoholic beverages that resemble sweet drinks such as soda and lemonade. It is believed that the sweetness of alcopops appeals to younger drinkers more readily than the taste of wine and beer, and may be a contributing factor in overall underage binge drinking.

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