

Healthy Stores for Healthy Communities Press Release Results
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New Survey finds progress in reducing the availability of harmful tobacco products, but more work is needed

Oxnard, CA – June 20 – New research shows that in Ventura County, the availability of e-cigarettes has increased from 51.3% in 2016 to 59.5% in 2019 among surveyed stores. This finding is 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 Ventura County, 67.3% of surveyed stores still have tobacco marketing in kid-friendly locations, such as near candy or toys or on shelves below three feet.

“The findings show that while we have made some progress in combatting tobacco marketing, our community’s youth are still surrounded by unhealthy choices and messages in the retail environment,” said Selfa Saucedo, Director of Health Education for Ventura County Public Health. “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 – and we know that we can largely prevent them by eliminating tobacco use, limiting alcohol use, eating healthy and being physically active.”

The survey found the following for Ventura County:

- 83.8% of stores surveyed sell flavored, non-cigarette tobacco products such as grape e-cigarettes, and this is a slight decrease since 2016 when 84.1% sold them. Most stores (92.2%) also sold menthol cigarettes. This is an increase of 10.2%.
- The clear majority of stores sold little cigars/cigarillos (80.2%) or chewing tobacco (62%). The percent of stores selling chewing tobacco has remained steady since 2016 when the survey was first initiated. These widely available products come in hundreds of enticing flavors and can be sold individually – making them very appealing to youth.
- More stores in Ventura County sold flavored tobacco products such as e-cigarettes, little cigars and chew, (78.2%) than fresh fruits and vegetables (49.5%) when surveyed. VICKY: Does this mean of the tobacco retailers surveyed? Or just all stores in VC>
- More than 45.4% of surveyed stores in Ventura 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 stores that were surveyed and sold alcohol, 87.4% sold alcopops an increase of over 15% from 2016. Just as with flavored tobacco products, these are alcoholic beverages that come in sweet and fruity flavors that mask the flavor of alcohol which can be appealing to kids.
- 88.1% of surveyed stores sold condoms, but only 50.9% 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 in California in 2018, bacterial STDs (chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis) significantly increased.

“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 Selfa Saucedo. “Ventura County Public Health 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 Ventura County. 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 available 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.

This information will also be available on the Health Matters in Ventura County Website. The website provides surveillance, data and analysis on a wide variety of health indicators for Ventura County, including births, communicable/ infectious disease, injury, and chronic disease; publishes the Ventura County Health Status Report. Visit our Health Matters website at <http://www.healthmattersinvc.org/>

Ventura County Public Health’s Mission is to support environments that protect and promote the health and well-being of everyone in Ventura County. We are educators, nurses, doctors, advocates, planners, researchers who work to create healthier people, families, and communities.

VCPH protects and promotes the health of all Ventura County residents. Public Health works with and supports community-based organizations and health care providers throughout Ventura County, particularly communities identified as having greater health disparities and reduced access to care.

Ventura County Public Health is a full-service health department serving the needs of Ventura County residents. VCPH was the first in California to earn national accreditation by meeting performance measure standards of the national Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). To receive national accreditation through PHAB, a health department must undergo a rigorous, multi-faceted, peer-reviewed assessment process to ensure it meets nationally established public health quality standards and measures.

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