

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

WHERE DO YOUTH SMOKERS GET THEIR CIGARETTES?

Roughly half of all youth smokers usually buy the cigarettes they smoke, either directly from retailers or vending machines or by giving money to others to buy for them. Another third typically get their cigarettes from others for free, and a smaller but significant percentage of kids obtain their cigarettes by shoplifting or other stealing. At the same time, 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 underage smokers are more likely to directly buy their cigarettes than younger smokers, who are more likely to get their cigarettes from others or by stealing. Some of this difference is explained by the fact that older kids typically find 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 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 the third of all youth smokers who get them from others. As a result, at least three quarters of all cigarettes consumed by kids are purchased by kids -- which is why raising cigarette prices through tax increases and strictly enforcing laws forbidding retailer sales to kids can quickly and significantly reduce youth smoking.

Research On How Kids Obtain Cigarettes

- The 1999 biennial 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 54.5 percent of those who had smoked in the past 30 days usually purchased their cigarettes -- with 23.5 percent usually buying their cigarettes from a store, 1.1 percent usually using vending machines, and 29.9 percent usually giving money to others to make their purchases. 30.4 percent usually borrowed their cigarettes from others and 4.4 percent usually stole their cigarettes. As with earlier CDC YRBS surveys, 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.¹
- In a 1999 Florida survey, 50.8 percent of high school students and 28.6 percent of middle school kids who had smoked in the past 30 days purchased their cigarettes from retailers or vending machines or by giving money to others to buy for them. Other sources were borrowing from non-adults (HS 15.5%, MS 13.5%), receiving cigarettes from parents (HS 4.4%, MS 5.5%), receiving them from other adults (HS 12.7%, MS 12.5%), stealing them from a store (HS 3.5%, MS 6.8%), and stealing from someone they know (HS 1.7%, MS 7.8%). Regular youth smokers were much more likely to purchase their cigarettes than experimental smokers (HS 69.8% vs. 35.1%; MS 46.1% vs. 22.3%).²

- In a 1999 New Jersey survey, 33.2 percent of 8 to 12 grade smokers obtained cigarettes by direct purchase, 19.4 percent gave someone else money to buy them, and 27.3 percent got them from someone else. More than twice as many high school smokers as middle school smokers directly purchased their own cigarettes.³
- The 1997 CDC national YRBS survey of 9th to 12th graders found that of those who had smoked in the past 30 days, 54.4 percent usually purchased their cigarettes – with 29.8 percent usually buying their cigarettes from a store, 1.7 percent usually using vending machines, and 22.9% usually giving money to others to make their purchases – and a third usually borrowed their cigarettes from others. *Among daily smokers, however, more than 84 percent usually purchased their cigarettes – with more than 47 percent buying directly from stores – and only 4.7 percent usually borrowed their cigarettes from others.* While 3.6 percent of all high school smokers usually got their cigarettes from stealing, more than 4.7 percent of daily high school smokers usually stole their cigarettes.⁴ In addition, 12th graders were two-and-a-half times more likely to usually buy their cigarettes directly from stores than 9th graders (43.5% vs. 17.8%).
- A 1997 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* reported that more than two-thirds (68.8%) of eighth- to tenth-grade smokers in Minnesota had provided cigarettes to another adolescent in the previous 30 days.⁵
- A 1996 California survey showed that 45.3 percent of 16 and 17 year olds who had ever smoked purchased their cigarettes directly or from others. Among the 52 percent who were given their cigarettes by others, only 1.4 percent received them from family members.⁶
- The 1995 biennial CDC national survey of 9th to 12th graders found that of those who had smoked in the past 30 days, percent usually purchased their cigarettes – with 38.7 percent usually buying their cigarettes from a store, 2.2 percent usually using vending machines, and 15.8 percent usually giving money to others to make their purchases. 32.9 percent usually borrowed their cigarettes from others and 4.2 percent usually stole their cigarettes. 42.3 percent of eighth graders usually directly or indirectly purchased their cigarettes, as did 56.0 percent of 10th graders, 65.6 percent of 11th graders, and 64.7 percent of 12th graders.⁷
- A 1995 North Carolina survey of *sixth to eighth graders* who had smoked in the past 30 days found that 32.1 percent had borrowed cigarettes from others, 16.9 percent had purchased cigarettes from a store, and 3.9 percent had purchased them from a vending machine.⁸
- A 1994 survey in an urban school with predominantly African-American students found that seventh graders who had ever tried smoking were more likely obtain the cigarettes from friends than by buying them in stores (31.2% vs. 14.3%). But 75.2 percent of the *regular* smokers among these 12 and 13 year olds purchased their cigarettes (while only 13.8 percent of the *experimental* smokers bought their own).⁹
- The 1993 CDC YRBS survey found that sixty-two percent of 12-17 year olds nationwide who had smoked in the past 30 days reported usually buying their own cigarettes, and another 16 percent said they had bought their cigarettes but did not usually do so.¹⁰
- A 1992 Massachusetts survey of 10 to 17 year olds who had ever tried a cigarette discovered that 71 percent had at some point purchased cigarettes directly and 66 percent had given money to others to buy their cigarettes. Getting cigarettes from friends, siblings, or even parents was also common, and stealing from others, parents, or stores were also

past sources. Almost half reported that some kids sold cigarettes to other kids at above-market or, more rarely, below-market prices. *While the vast majority of these kids received their first cigarette for free from friends or others, typically at age 12, within ten weeks of their first puff 50 percent had purchased their own cigarettes.*¹¹

- A 1989 survey by the National Automatic Merchandising Association of teenagers in shopping malls in 20 U.S. cities found that 72 percent of teen smokers purchased their own cigarettes with 19 percent relying on their friends to supply them.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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Related Fact Sheets From the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

- *Increasing Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking Among Youths*
- *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*

Copies are available at the Campaign's website, www.tobaccofreekids.org, or by contacting the Campaign at factsheets@tobaccofreekids.org or 202-296-5469.

¹ 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), http://www2.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_ss.html, and underlying data.

² Florida Department of Health, Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (1999), www.state.fl.us/tobacco.

³ Division of Addiction Services, New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, *1999 New Jersey Youth Tobacco Survey: A Statewide Report* (April 2000).

⁴ 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.

⁵ Wolfson M., et al., "Adolescent Smokers' Provision of Tobacco to Other Adolescents," *American Journal of Public Health* 87(4):649-51 (April 1997). See also, Ribisl, K.M., et al., "Which Adults Do Underaged Youth Ask for Cigarettes?," *American Journal of Public Health* 89(10):1561-1564 (October 1999) [In a 1996 survey in California, more than 40% of 18 to 19 year olds reported having been asked to provide cigarettes to a minor, as did a bit less

than 25% of 20 to 24 year olds. Older adults were much less likely to have been asked, and smokers were much more likely to be asked than nonsmokers].

⁶ Cancer Prevention and Control Program, University of California, San Diego, *Tobacco Control in California; Who's Winning the War?* (June 30, 1998), <http://ssdc.ucsd.edu/tobacco/reports>.

⁷ U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), "Tobacco Use and Usual Source of Cigarettes Among High School Students--United States, 1995," *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 45(20): 413-8 (May 24, 1996), http://www2.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_wk.html.

⁸ Gratias E.J., et al., "Middle school students' sources of acquiring cigarettes and requests for proof of age," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 25(4):276-83 (October 1999).

⁹ Robinson L.A, Klesges RC, Zbikowski SM, "Gender and Ethnic Differences in Young Adolescents' Sources of Cigarettes," *Tobacco Control* 7(4):353-59 (Winter 1998).

¹⁰ CDC, "Accessibility of Tobacco Products to Youths Aged 12-17 Years – United States, 1989 and 1993," *MMWR* 45(06):125-130 (February 16, 1996), http://www2.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_wk.html.

¹¹ DiFranza, J.R., et al., "Tobacco Acquisition and Cigarette Brand Selection Among Youth," *Tobacco Control* 3: 334-38 (1994).

¹² Cummings, K.M., T. Pechacek & D. Shopland, "The Illegal Sale of Cigarettes to U.S. Minors: Estimates By State," *American Journal of Public Health*, (February 1994).

¹³ On tax and price increases, see, e.g., Chaloupka, F.J. & R. Pacula, *An Examination of Gender and Race Differences in Youth Smoking Responsiveness to Price and Tobacco Control Policies*, National Bureau of Economic Research, working paper (April 1998), www.uic.edu/~fjc/; Harris, J.E. & S.W. Chan, "The Continuum-of-Addiction: Cigarette Smoking in Relation to Price Among Americans Aged 15-29," *Health Economics Letters* 2(2) 3-12 (February 1998); Evans, W.N. & L.X. Huang, *Cigarette Taxes and Teen Smoking: New Evidence from Panels of Repeated Cross-Sections*, working paper (April 15, 1998), www.bsos.umd.edu/econ/evans/wrkpap.htm. On enforcing youth-sales laws, see, e.g., Forster J.L. et al. "The Effects of Community Policies to Reduce Youth Access to Tobacco." *American Journal of Public Health* 88: 1193-1198 (1998); Jason, L.A., et al., "Active Enforcement of Cigarette Control Laws in the Prevention of Cigarette Sales to Minors." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 266(22):3159-3161 (December 11, 1991).

¹⁴ 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); DiFranza, J.R. & L.J. Brown, "The Tobacco Institute's "It's the Law" Campaign: Has It Halting Illegal Sales of Tobacco to Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 82(9): 1271-73 (September 1992).

¹⁵ 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).