

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

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. 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 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, at least three quarters 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 2003 NHSDA 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.¹

The 2003 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 18.9 percent directly purchased their cigarettes from stores or gas stations, with more than a quarter of all 11th and 12th graders making such direct purchases.² While the 2003 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.³

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 percent taking them from a store or family members.⁴ 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 (and 58.1% were

not asked to show proof of age). No data was provided on the percentage buying their cigarettes from other kids.

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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, September 17, 2004 / Eric Lindblom

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

² U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2003*, *CDC Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 53:SS-2, May 21, 2004, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5302a1.htm>.

³ 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.

⁴ 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>.

⁵ See the Campaign factsheets listed above, and the many cited references therein.

⁶ 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 Campaign fact sheet listed above.

⁷ 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).