



SAN BENITO COUNTY

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Healthy People in Healthy Communities

New Survey Finds Tobacco Products More Available than Milk and Fresh Fruit

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
8 March 2017

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Hollister, CA – March 8, 2017 – A recent survey shows that in San Benito County 24% of stores sell fresh fruits and vegetables, but 70% sell flavored tobacco products which often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate. 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.

Today, throughout California, health advocates held 13 press events to release results of the scientific survey, which is the largest its kind. It builds upon an initial research released three years ago in March 2014 and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products during this time. Information was collected in the summer of 2016 from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties including pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores as well as tobacco-only stores. In San Benito County all stores in the county (44) were surveyed.

“Overall, the findings show a continuing and alarming discrepancy in our county in the accessibility and marketing between products that promote a healthy lifestyle, and those that don’t,” said Dr. Newell, Health Officer for San Benito County. “Stores play a critical role in our community’s health, and this survey shows offerings and messaging are out of balance, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options. Our goal is to help re-calibrate the balance toward health.”

The survey found the following for San Benito County:

- In addition to selling cigarettes, 54 % of stores sell “little cigars” or cigarillos, but only 24% of stores sold fresh fruits or vegetables. What’s more, 90% of stores sold a popular brand of “little cigars” individually for under a dollar, less than the cost of a candy bar.
- 43% of stores sold non- or low-fat milk, but nearly 87% sell alcohol.
- 70% of surveyed stores sell condoms, but only 19% sell them on unlocked shelves.
- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in San Benito County in stores from the last time this survey was conducted, up more than 11%.

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“The expanded availability of e-cigarettes in our county are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last three years,” said Sam Perez, Program Manager with Public Health Services.

Another goal was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth.

“This survey found that our community’s youth are inundated with unhealthy messages and choices. We need to change what information and options our kids are exposed to and work to surround them with healthy choices and messaging instead,” said Sam Perez.

The survey also found the following for San Benito County:

- Only 24% of stores advertised healthy products on their storefronts, but 76% of storefronts advertised unhealthy products. 73% of stores near schools have storefront advertising for unhealthy products.
- More than 35% of stores place tobacco products or ads in kid-friendly locations, such as tobacco ads at ‘kid-level’ (three feet or below) or tobacco products near candy or toys.
- More than 31% of stores placed alcohol ads at “kid-level” or near kid-friendly items such as candy or toys.
- 70% of stores sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, which often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate, gummy candies and even breakfast cereals. Similarly, 64% of stores near schools also sell flavored tobacco products.

“Tobacco-related illnesses remain the single most preventable cause of disease and death in California. Communities are urged to institute policies to reduce smoking rates and exposure to secondhand smoke, and to protect our children from a lifetime of addiction. Public health is looking at ways to reduce the prevalence of smoking and improve the health of our residents. We are 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 our community members”, said Dr. Newell.

Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community is a statewide campaign formed by tobacco prevention, nutrition, alcohol abuse prevention and STD prevention partners collaborating to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impact of unhealthy product availability and marketing in the retail environment.

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Monterey Regional (Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties) survey findings include:

1. Alcopops* are sold at 58% of stores.
2. Tobacco chew is sold at 56% of stores.

For state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit 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 or beer, and may be a contributing factor in overall underage binge drinking.

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