



WHERE DO YOUTH SMOKERS GET THEIR CIGARETTES?

According to the 2020 Monitoring the Future Survey, nearly two out of every five (38.1%) eighth graders and about half (50.4%) of tenth graders say cigarettes are easy for them to get.¹ Where and how youth smokers get their cigarettes, however, can vary considerably from state to state or city to city, depending on factors such as whether the jurisdiction strictly enforces the laws prohibiting tobacco sales to minors or requires retailers to keep all tobacco products behind the counter.

Some youth smokers buy the cigarettes they smoke, either directly from retailers or other kids, or by giving money to others to buy for them. Others get their cigarettes for free from social sources (usually other kids), and still others obtain their cigarettes by shoplifting or stealing.

Nationwide, older youth smokers are more likely to buy their cigarettes directly than younger smokers, who are more likely to get their cigarettes from others or by stealing.² Some of this difference is because kids who look older typically find it easier to buy cigarettes than younger kids; but another powerful factor is that older youth smokers are more likely to be regular smokers, and regular smokers are much more likely to purchase their own cigarettes than kids who smoke less frequently or are only "experimenting."³ Not surprisingly, older or regular youth smokers who buy their own cigarettes also supply them to kids who do not purchase their own but instead rely on getting them from others.⁴

Direct Purchases of Cigarettes

The 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) survey of high school students in grades 9–12 found that 12.6 percent of current smokers aged <18 years had directly purchased their cigarettes from stores or gas stations, with nearly one-sixth (16.5%) of all twelfth grade smokers aged <18 years making such direct purchases.⁵ Data from an earlier YRBS and other independent studies show that older teens and youth of any age who are daily smokers are more likely to buy their cigarettes from stores than younger teens and non-daily smokers.⁶

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) also has looked at youth access to cigarettes, asking 12-17 year olds to report all methods of acquiring cigarettes. In 2003 (the most recent year to include questions on youth access), 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; and three out of ten (30.5%) had purchased cigarettes from a friend, family member, or someone at school. 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. Just less than one percent (0.8%) had stolen cigarettes from a store. Older underage smokers were more likely than younger smokers to buy cigarettes directly in stores.⁷

A 2006 study conducted in the Memphis city school system found that even among 11 and 12 year old seventh grade students, 11 percent were able to purchase their cigarettes from stores. In addition, 30 percent got their cigarettes from friends, six percent from vending machines, and 17 percent stole them.⁸

Social Sources of Cigarettes

Youth smokers also identify social sources, such as friends and classmates, as a common source of cigarettes. As noted above, although older and more established youth smokers are more likely to attempt to purchase their cigarettes directly than kids who smoke less frequently or are only "experimenting," they also supply cigarettes to kids who rely on getting them from others.⁹ And with more 18- and 19-year olds in high school now than in previous years, younger adolescents have daily contact with students who can legally purchase tobacco for them.¹⁰

A 2005 study based on the California Tobacco Survey found that 82 percent of adolescent ever smokers obtained their cigarettes from others, most of whom were friends. A substantial percentage (40.9%) of the people buying or giving the cigarettes were of legal age (18 years or older) to purchase them, with most

(31.3%) being between 18 and 20 years of age. 16- to 17-year-olds were more likely to get their cigarettes from 18- to 20-year olds than were younger adolescents.¹¹ Another study found that smokers aged 18 and 19 years were most likely to have been asked to provide tobacco to a minor, followed by smokers aged 20 to 24 years and nonsmokers aged 18 and 19 years, respectively.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 reduces both the number of kids who try or regularly smoke cigarettes and the number of cigarettes consumed by kids who continue to smoke. Because youth purchases are a source of cigarettes smoked by kids, increasing cigarette prices and minimizing the number of retailers willing to illegally sell cigarettes to kids will reduce youth smoking.¹³

While these measures directly affect youth 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, will be careless about leaving their cigarettes where kids can easily take them, or won't 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 Likewise, although the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act prohibits vending machine cigarette sales except for in adult-only facilities, older children and youth who appear older may still be able to obtain cigarettes from these self-service machines.¹⁵

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, December 16, 2020

More information is available at

http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/fact_sheets/toll/tobacco_kids/ and http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/fact_sheets/policies/prevention_us_state/save_lives_money/.

¹ University of Michigan, 2020 Overview: Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use, <http://monitoringthefuture.org/data/20data.html#2020data-drugs>.

² Lenk, KM, et al., "Do Sources of Cigarettes Among Adolescents Vary by Age Over Time?" *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 23:137-143, 2014. See also, Johnston, LD, et al., "Methods, Locations, and Ease of Cigarette Access for American Youth, 1997-2002," *Am J Prev Med*, 27(4):267-276, 2004; CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2013," *MMWR* 63(No. 4), June 23, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>; 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.

³ Lenk, KM, et al., "Do Sources of Cigarettes Among Adolescents Vary by Age Over Time?" *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 23:137-143, 2014. See also, Johnston, LD, et al., "Methods, Locations, and Ease of Cigarette Access for American Youth, 1997-2002," *Am J Prev Med*, 27(4):267-276, 2004; Robinson, LA, et al., "Changes in Adolescents' Sources of Cigarettes," *Jnl of Adolescent Health*, 39:861-867, 2006.

⁴ Lenk, KM, et al., "Do Sources of Cigarettes Among Adolescents Vary by Age Over Time?" *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 23:137-143, 2014. See also, Robinson, LA, et al., "Changes in Adolescents' Sources of Cigarettes," *Jnl of Adolescent Health*, 39:861-867, 2006.

⁵ CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2015," *MMWR*, 65(6), June 10, 2016. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506_updated.pdf.

⁶ Lenk, KM, et al., "Do Sources of Cigarettes Among Adolescents Vary by Age Over Time?" *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 23:137-143, 2014. See also, Johnston, LD, et al., "Methods, Locations, and Ease of Cigarette Access for American Youth, 1997-2002," *Am J Prev Med*, 27(4):267-276, 2004; CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2013," *MMWR* 63(No. 4), June 23, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>; 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.

⁷ Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services, 2003 *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, September 9, 2004.

⁸ Robinson, LA, et al., "Changes in Adolescents' Sources of Cigarettes," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39:861-867, 2006.

⁹ Robinson, LA, et al. "Changes in Adolescents' Sources of Cigarettes," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39:861 – 867, 2006. White, MM, et al. "Facilitating Adolescent Smoking: Who Provides the Cigarettes?" *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 19(5): 355 – 360, May/June 2005.

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¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, "Enrollment Trends by Age (Indicator 1-2012)," *The Condition of Education*, 2012, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_ope.pdf. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Data on School Enrollment, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/index.html>. Ahmad, S, "Closing the youth access gap: The projected health benefits and costs savings of a national policy to raise the legal smoking age to 21 in the United States," *Health Policy*, 75:74 – 84, 2005. White, MM, et al. "Facilitating Adolescent Smoking: Who Provides the Cigarettes?" *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 19(5): 355 – 360, May/June 2005.

¹¹ White, MM, et al. "Facilitating Adolescent Smoking: Who Provides the Cigarettes?" *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 19(5): 355 – 360, May/June 2005.

¹² Ribisl, KM, et al., "Which Adults Do Underaged Youth Ask for Cigarettes?" *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(10):1561 – 1564.

¹³ See related Campaign fact sheets "Raising Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking, Especially Among Kids (and the Cigarette Companies Know It)," <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0146.pdf> and "Enforcing Laws Prohibiting Cigarette Sales to Kids Reduces Youth Smoking," <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0049.pdf>.

¹⁴ DiFranza, JR, 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. See also, Campaign fact sheet "Cigarette Company Youth Access Initiatives: Fake and Ineffective," <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0285.pdf>.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Forster, JL, et al., "Availability of Cigarettes to Underage Youth in Three Communities," *Preventive Medicine* 21(3):320-28, May 1992; Kolpien, KA & Lippert, MT, "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, JL, et al., "Locking Devices on Cigarette Vending Machines: Evaluation of a City Ordinance," *Am J of Public Health*, 82(9):1217-19, September 1992.