

# 'Hiding' cigarettes in stores might keep kids from smoking: study

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Photo: National Institutes of Health

U.S. law gives states, local governments the means to restrict advertising strategy and placement.

(HealthDay)—U.S. teens are much less likely to buy cigarettes if they are hidden from view, new research suggests.

The study tracked the purchases of a group of adolescents as they "shopped" in several different virtual convenience stores that contained different cigarette sale scenarios. Some stores featured open displays of tobacco products for sale, while others strategically hid their cigarettes behind a cabinet. Similarly, cigarette advertising was either prominent, hidden or banned.

"Studies show that because tobacco displays and ads are so common in

stores, they may give kids the false perception that [smoking cigarettes](#) is a common behavior," explained study author Annice Kim, a research public health analyst with the [public health policy](#) research program at RTI International in Durham, N.C. "[Tobacco displays](#) also influence adults to purchase cigarettes when they had not planned to, which may make it harder for current smokers to quit and may even influence recent quitters to relapse."

Passage of the U.S. [Tobacco Control Act](#) in 2009 gave states and [local governments](#) the legal means to tackle the issue by allowing them to restrict various aspects of cigarette advertising strategy and placement.

"[So] banning the visible display of tobacco products is one option that states are considering," along the lines of current bans already in place in both Canada and Australia, Kim said.

In the new study's virtual, interactive [convenience stores](#), she said, "we found that kids who shopped in the enclosed [hidden] display version of the store were less likely to try purchasing cigarettes than kids in the open-display version of the store."

However, she said, the researchers "found no support that banning tobacco ads throughout the store would discourage kids from trying to purchase cigarettes."

The findings appear online Dec. 3 issue and in the January print issue of *Pediatrics*.

The authors noted that according to the latest 2010 U.S Federal Trade Commission statistics, the tobacco industry spends roughly \$8 billion on [cigarette advertising](#) and promotions. And the lion's share, Kim said, is devoted to the promotion of cigarettes in a retail store setting.

The new study focused on more than 1,200 [adolescents](#) between the ages of 13 and 17, some of whom were [smokers](#) and some of whom were not.

All were randomly presented with one of six different virtual convenience store situations, containing various scenario combinations in which cigarette products were either openly present or present but hidden, while tobacco ads were either present, hidden or banned altogether. The teens were given free rein as to what they "clicked" and purchased, with the only instruction being to pick up one drink, one snack and two additional items at check-out.

The result: The banning of all in-store cigarette ads appeared to have a minimal impact on cigarette shopping habits. However, when shopping in stores where tobacco products themselves were hidden, only 32 percent of teens appeared to be aware of the availability of cigarettes to begin with, compared with about 85 of those who shopped in stores where cigarettes were openly displayed.

In turn, only 9 percent of teens shopping in the hidden display scenario bought cigarettes, compared with more than 24 percent of those who virtually strolled through a store that openly featured cigarettes.

"These results suggest that policies that require retailers to store [tobacco products](#) out of view—behind enclosed cabinets—could have a positive public health impact by discouraging kids from purchasing cigarettes," Kim said.

For his part, Danny McGoldrick, vice president for research at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, embraced the study findings, and suggested that they support the need for new cigarette display restriction laws, given that for-profit stores are otherwise highly unlikely to voluntarily limit the display of products.

"The study's finding that the removal of tobacco product displays reduced youth tobacco purchases shows just how effective the displays are in getting kids to smoke," McGoldrick said. "States and the federal government should increase tobacco taxes and invest in [tobacco](#) prevention programs to counter the impact of these industry efforts."

**More information:** For more on children and tobacco, visit the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#).

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