

# Campus debit cards let students buy cigarettes with parents' money

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Does your college allow tobacco purchases with a campus debit card? Credit: Flickr/Michelle cc license

A University of Colorado Cancer Center study published in the *British Medical Journal: Tobacco Control* shows that of the top 100 universities as ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*, 11 allow tobacco sales and 13 allow e-cigarette sales on "campus cash" debit cards that are commonly prepaid by parents.

"Parents put money on these debit cards and kids spend the money. What parents don't realize is that [tobacco](#) may be purchased with some of these college debit cards," says Robert P. Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH, investigator at the CU Cancer Center, associate professor of dermatology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, and the study's senior author.

Many colleges offer prepaid debit cards linked to students' [campus](#) ID cards, that can be used either at on-campus vending areas like bookstores and cafeterias, and/or at off-campus vendors that act like preferred providers. Providers generally pay a premium to be included in these campus-linked networks. The current study examined online lists of on- and off-campus vendors (with phone and email follow-up as needed) to discover universities whose policies allow the sale of tobacco and e-cigarettes within the campus [debit card](#) network.

In all, 94 of the 100 surveyed universities included an ID-linked debit card program, with a total enrollment of 1,452,048 students. Previous research shows that of university students who smoke, 42 percent had used campus debit cards to purchase cigarettes.

"Cracking down on this 'campus cash' is a major opportunity for these colleges to take a step toward preventing tobacco use on their campuses," says Lindsay Boyers, Georgetown University medical student working in the Dellavalle Laboratory, and the paper's first author.

In addition to the direct health effects of tobacco and e-cigarette products, the researchers point out that what is sold on campuses and within the networks of campus-approved vendors can reflect what is deemed socially acceptable behavior.

"Universities shouldn't be taking debit card fees from in-network vendors selling tobacco products to their students," Dellavalle says.

The paper suggests that, "As an organization dedicated to university health, the American College Health Association can take a stand on this issue by banning universities from selling tobacco products on campus and prohibiting debit card purchase of off-campus [tobacco products](#)."

**More information:** *British Medical Journal: Tobacco Control*,  
[tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content ... -2014-051957.extract](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content...-2014-051957.extract)

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