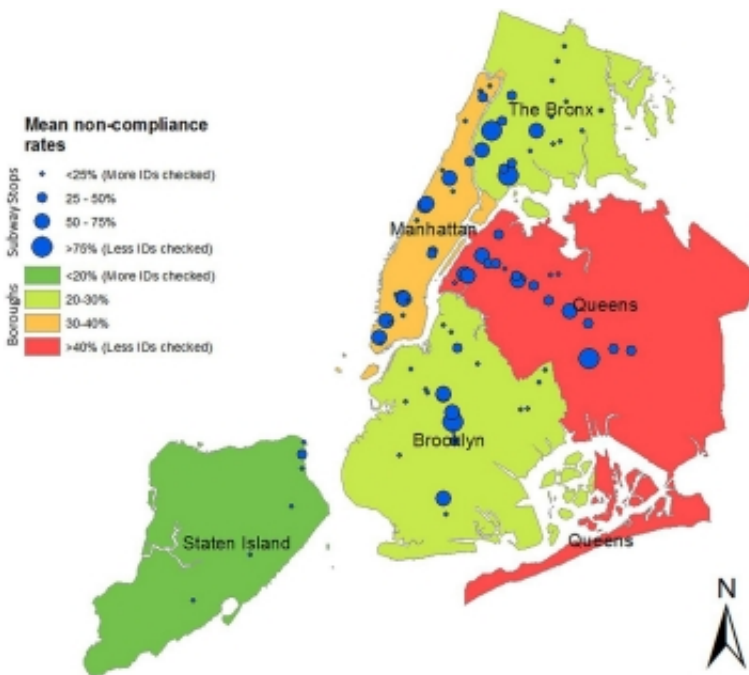


# Study finds lack of ID checks for buying cigarettes in NYC

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In 29 percent of cigarette purchases, investigators (ages 18-21) were not asked for identification. Image courtesy of the researchers/*Tobacco Control*.

An investigation by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development found that more than a quarter of New York City retailers did not request identification from young adults buying cigarettes. The study, published online in the *BMJ* journal *Tobacco Control*, was conducted in anticipation of the minimum purchase age for cigarettes rising from 18 to 21.

"Our findings suggest the need for intensive monitoring, oversight, and support to help retailers comply with existing and new cigarette laws," said Diana Silver, associate professor of public health at NYU Steinhardt and the study's lead author.

On August 1, 2014, New York City raised the minimum purchase age for [cigarettes](#) from 18 to 21. The new law is intended to decrease current smoking rates among youth and prevent them from starting to smoke.

"One benefit of restricting tobacco sales to those 21 and older is that it makes it more difficult for younger high school students to rely on friends who have turned 18 to purchase cigarettes for them," said Silver. "Reducing access to such 'social sources' offers the potential to make progress in reducing smoking among teens."

New York City also has the highest cigarette taxes in the country, a combination of local and state taxes, resulting in minimum prices for cigarettes of \$11.02 and above.

"Given evidence of price sensitivity among young smokers, taxes are particularly effective in decreasing smoking initiation - even as tobacco companies use discounts to buffer price increases," said Silver.

The study examined compliance with minimum sales price and purchase age laws among retailers in New York City in advance of raising the legal age for buying cigarettes from 18 to 21. Ten youthful-looking field investigators, ages 18 to 21, purchased cigarettes from different types of retailers in 92 retail-dense neighborhoods throughout all five boroughs. In 421 purchases, investigators noted the price for cigarettes and whether they were asked for identification.

The researchers found that in 29 percent of purchases, retailers did not require identification to buy cigarettes. In 70 percent of neighborhoods

sampled, the investigators were able to buy at least one pack of cigarettes somewhere in the area without being asked for identification.

Chain stores had significantly higher odds of complying with minimum age laws than independent vendors; investigators were 32 times more likely to be asked for identification at chains.

Despite variation in price across New York City, only 3 percent of sales were at prices below the minimum legal sales price for cigarettes. Chain stores had, on average, lower prices than independent vendors, and cigarette prices were significantly higher in Manhattan compared with other boroughs.

While the investigation was conducted before the new minimum legal purchase age increased to 21, the researchers concluded that a lack of consistent identification checks for cigarette purchases could undermine the new law.

"Active monitoring of compliance with the new minimum legal purchase age will be necessary in order to realize the new law's public health potential," said Silver.

Provided by New York University

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