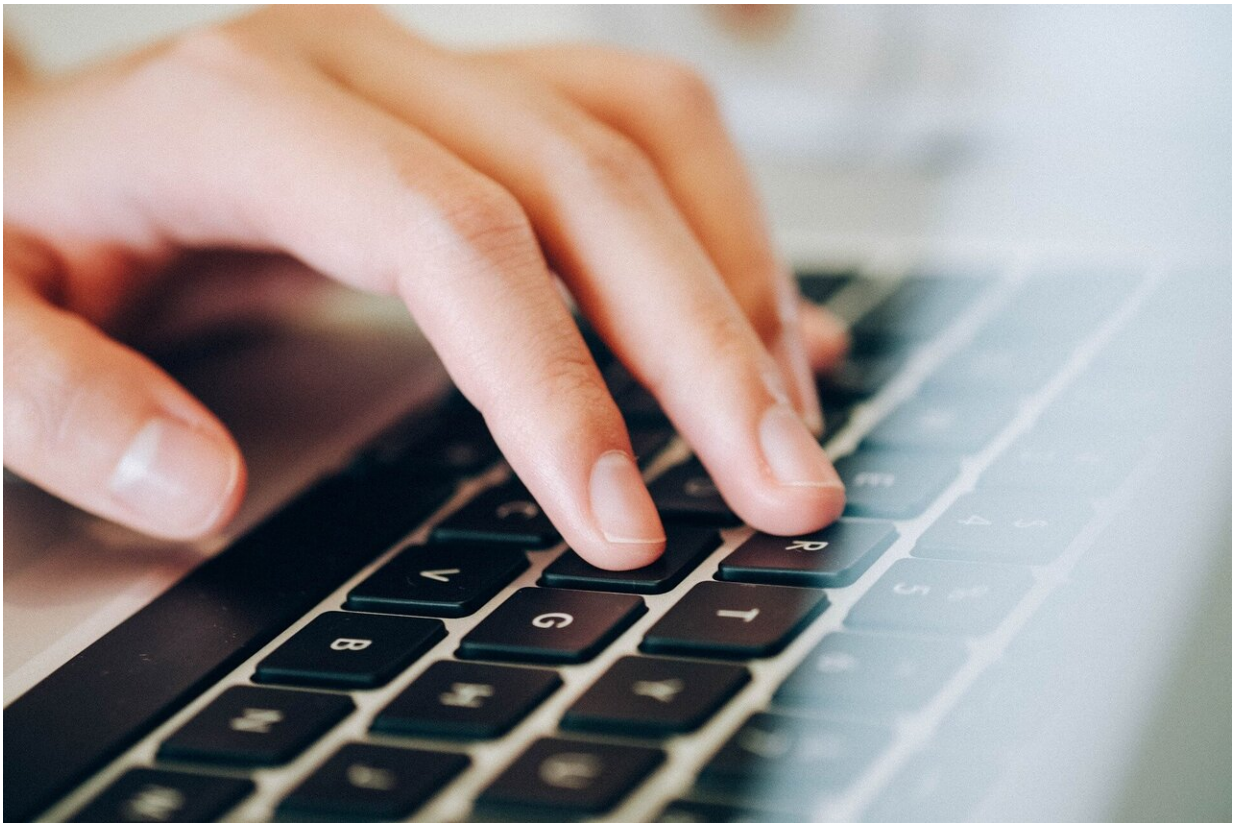


Online shopping for tobacco products rises with California flavor restrictions

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Online shopping for cigarettes and vaping products increased significantly in the weeks following the implementation of SB-793, a 2022 California law prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products.

Researchers at the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science at University of California San Diego identified potential loopholes in [tobacco control policies](#) due to the absence of explicit regulations on e-commerce sales in retailer licensing programs.

Reporting in the journal *Tobacco Control* on Nov. 7, 2023, researchers assessed the impact of California's statewide flavor restriction on [online shopping](#) behavior among consumers. Comparing observed rates of shopping queries with expected rates, researchers discovered that shopping queries were 194% higher than expected for cigarettes and 162% higher than expected for vape products.

"Retailer licensing programs have proven to be effective in enforcing tobacco control laws. However, the exclusion of e-commerce retailers from these programs can undermine their impact," said principal investigator Eric Leas, Ph.D., MPH, an assistant professor at the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science at UC San Diego and director of the Tobacco E-commerce Lab.

Despite the flavor restriction imposed by SB-793, analysis of the first 60 websites returned in the search queries presented at least two online retailers offered access to flavored vaping products or [menthol cigarettes](#) to consumers in California—with one query returning as many as 36 websites (60% of the [search results](#))—highlighting the potential shortcomings of retailer licensing programs that do not include e-commerce retailers in their regulations.

"The absence of explicit regulations on e-commerce sales can create loopholes in enforcing tobacco control laws, allowing consumers to easily access restricted products online," said Leas. "By including e-commerce in the definition of 'tobacco retailer' and ensuring strict compliance monitoring, we can close these loopholes and improve the

effectiveness of [tobacco](#) control policies."

To address these concerns, the study authors recommend strengthening regulations to include e-commerce retailers within the scope of retailer licensing programs. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of monitoring online compliance to ensure the effectiveness of laws enforced through retailer licensing programs.

"The study's findings have important implications for policymakers and public health advocates, emphasizing the need for comprehensive regulations that address the challenges posed by the growing [e-commerce](#) market for [tobacco products](#)," said Leas.

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More information: The E-Commerce Licensing Loophole: A Case Study of Online Shopping for Tobacco Products Following a Statewide Sales Restriction on Flavored Tobacco in California, *Tobacco Control* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/tc-2023-058269](https://doi.org/10.1136/tc-2023-058269)

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