

Stopping the Sale of Tobacco to Kids

Tobacco Facts*

March 2009

There are about 70,000 youth who smoke cigarettes in Washington.

Forty-five children in Washington start smoking cigarettes every day. Surveys of adult smokers in Washington show that about half of them had first tried cigarettes by age 14, and 70 percent of them were smoking regularly before they left high school.

Percent of youth smoking by grade:
Grade 6: 1 percent
Grade 8: 7 percent
Grade 10: 14 percent
Grade 12: 20 percent

In Washington it is illegal for youth under the age of 18 to use or possess tobacco. It is also illegal for anyone to give tobacco to a person under the age of 18. The Department of Health Tobacco Prevention and Control Program (Tobacco Program) supports the efforts of county and school tobacco prevention programs to restrict youth access to tobacco.

A broad approach to restricting availability

Community tobacco prevention programs and their partners, with the support of the state Tobacco Program, monitor tobacco sales, educate retailers and the community about tobacco sale and possession laws, and conduct on-site checks to ensure compliance with state law.

*Data Source:
2008 Healthy Youth Survey

Retailer compliance checks and education

Federal law requires states to keep youth tobacco sales rates at or below 20 percent. Compliance with this requirement is measured through random checks of retailers during which kids attempt to buy tobacco. In 2008, Washington youth were able to purchase tobacco about 15.4 percent of the time.

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The Tobacco Program requires its local contractors to conduct compliance checks and educate retailers about the law. To help with this effort, the Tobacco Program and its partners provide retailers with information about tobacco sales, legal requirements, and display regulations, and show them how to help their employees comply with the law. Training is available for store employees from both Liquor Control Board and local tobacco prevention program staff.

Licensing and monitoring sales

The Tobacco Program works closely with the state Liquor Control Board to ensure retailer compliance with tobacco sales laws. The Liquor Control Board conducts on-site inspections to ensure that approved signage and licensing requirements are met; tracks and enforces violations; and works with retailers to correct problems. In addition, the Tobacco Program and Liquor Control Board track the distribution of free tobacco products in clubs and at events like fairs, concerts, and rodeos, and work with communities to ensure applicable laws and requirements are met.

Restricting social sources

As tobacco becomes more difficult to obtain from stores, kids turn to social sources, such as older friends, family members, and other adults to obtain tobacco. The Tobacco Program and its partners are producing new programs and informational materials to discourage adults from providing tobacco to minors. The program encourages local programs to try innovative approaches to limiting youth access to tobacco, such as Puyallup's TIES (Tobacco Intervention Education and Support) project in which local officials combine enforcement of youth possession laws, school policies, and public education to discourage youth from buying, possessing, and using tobacco.

A comprehensive approach to fighting tobacco use

Research shows that tobacco prevention programs must conduct a comprehensive set of strategies to be effective. The Washington State Tobacco Prevention and Control Program provides services to help people quit, conducts public awareness and media campaigns, supports local programs in communities and schools, supports enforcement of policies to keep kids from accessing tobacco products, and evaluates the effectiveness of program activities.

Find out more about
secondhand smoke:
SmokeFreeWashington.com

Find out more about the
Tobacco Quit Line at:
www.QuitLine.com

Visit our youth Web site at:
www.NoStankYou.com

For more information on
tobacco prevention:
www.doh.wa.gov/tobacco