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New Study: 72% of Public Schools in Chicago Are Within 1,000 Feet of Tobacco Retailers; City Is Home to 19 Times More Tobacco Retailers Than McDonald's

Easy Access to Tobacco, Availability of Kid-Friendly Flavored Products
Increase Risk of Youth Nicotine Addiction

WASHINGTON, D.C. (August 12, 2020) – In Chicago, 72% of public schools are within 1,000 feet – about two city blocks – of a tobacco retailer, according to a comprehensive [new study](#) mapping tobacco retailers in 30 major U.S. cities. The study was conducted by researchers from the Stanford University School of Medicine, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Washington University in St. Louis.

Other [key findings for Chicago](#) include:

- Tobacco retailers are ubiquitous. There are 19 times more tobacco retailers than McDonald's restaurants and 11 times more than Starbucks.
- Tobacco retailers are easy to access. 88% of city residents live within a half mile, or about a ten-minute walk, of a tobacco retailer.

Across the 30 cities, the study found, on average, that 63% of public schools are located within 1,000 feet of a tobacco retailer, and the lowest-income neighborhoods have nearly five times more tobacco retailers than the highest-income neighborhoods. On average, 70% of residents across the 30 cities live within a half mile of a tobacco retailer.

"In city after city, this research shows just how pervasive tobacco retailers are in our neighborhoods and near our schools. Retailers give the tobacco industry a massive footprint where it spends nearly a million dollars every hour on retail advertising and discounts to appeal to youth and other price-sensitive customers," said Lisa Henriksen, PhD, senior research scientist at the Stanford University School of Medicine and lead researcher on the study.

"This study powerfully illustrates how the tobacco industry continues to target kids in Chicago and across the nation," said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, which provided support for the release of the study. "The tobacco industry is hooking a new generation of kids by aggressively marketing its products, including flavored e-cigarettes and menthol cigarettes, in locations where kids are continually exposed and have easy access. Policymakers must take action to protect our kids and communities, starting with a ban on the sale of all flavored tobacco products."

In an effort to end the sale of flavored products in Chicago, which disproportionately target Hispanic and African American youth, a coalition of clergy, medical professionals, community organizers and elected officials have partnered to create and support an ordinance that would end the sale of flavored tobacco products.

“Given the link between respiratory issues and the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we act now to protect young people from a lifetime of tobacco addiction,” said Alderman Matthew O’Shea (19th Ward), a coalition member. “We are at a critical time where we have the opportunity to save children’s lives by getting these products out of circulation. It is imperative that we act now to save our next generation from a lifetime of health issues.”

“The targeting of young people with these products is a device that has been used for years. The push for flavored and menthol tobacco is an old trick that must be stopped,” said Father Michael Pflieger of St. Sabina Church and coalition member. “We are asking all Chicagoans to come together to make sure that the ordinance moves forward now.”

Funded by the National Cancer Institute, the research was conducted by the Advancing Science and Practice in the Retail Environment (ASPiRE) Center, a collaborative that investigates how tobacco retailer density and innovative retail tobacco interventions impact people and communities. Using a wide range of data from state and local governments and other sources, the researchers mapped retailers that sell cigarettes, e-cigarettes and other tobacco products in 30 large cities across the United States, providing the most comprehensive study to date showing the ubiquity of tobacco retailers and their proximity to schools. Approximately 29 million adults and 8 million children (1 in 9 U.S. residents) live in these 30 cities.

According to the researchers, “Living in neighborhoods with a higher concentration of tobacco retailers makes youth more likely to start using tobacco and makes quitting more difficult. In addition, higher concentrations of tobacco retailers in disadvantaged neighborhoods contribute to health disparities.”

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, resulting in over 480,000 deaths and \$170 billion in health care expenses each year.

While the U.S. has greatly reduced cigarette smoking, youth use of e-cigarettes has skyrocketed in recent years. According to the [2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey](#), e-cigarette use among high school students nationwide more than doubled between 2017 and 2019 (from 11.7% to 27.5%) and over 5.3 million U.S. kids now use e-cigarettes. [Research](#) shows that 97% of current youth e-cigarette users used a flavored product in the past month, and 80% of youth who had ever used tobacco started with a flavored product.

In Illinois, 7.6% of high school students smoke traditional cigarettes, while 13.2% use e-cigarettes. Tobacco use claims 18,300 lives in Illinois each year.

About the ASPiRE Center

Funded by the National Cancer Institute, Advancing Science and Practice in the Retail Environment (ASPiRE) Center is a collaborative that investigates how tobacco retailer density and innovative retail tobacco interventions impact people and communities. The Center’s goal

is to build a strong base of scientific evidence for effective retail policies to reduce tobacco use, tobacco-related disparities and the public health burden of tobacco. ASPIRE researchers from the Stanford University School of Medicine, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Washington University in St. Louis work in partnership with a Community Advisory Board (CAB) comprised of tobacco control program staff from 30 large U.S. cities, representatives from several tobacco control organizations and agencies, and legal experts.

About the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is the leading advocacy organization working to reduce tobacco use and its deadly consequences in the United States and around the world. Through strategic communications and policy advocacy campaigns, Tobacco-Free Kids promotes the adoption of proven solutions that are most effective at reducing tobacco use and save the most lives. Tobacco-Free Kids works in partnership with the ASPIRE Center as a member of its Community Advisory Board (CAB).