



background



Getting Them To Say No *Studies identify promising prevention strategies*

Preventing children from becoming smokers has been an enduring challenge in the United States.

Last year, an important opportunity to curb youth smoking emerged when the tobacco industry agreed to pay \$206 billion to settle a class-action lawsuit filed over the costs of treating sick smokers in 48 states. Pennsylvania, alone, is expected to receive \$11.3 billion over 25 years.

How to spend the money is still being debated in Pennsylvania. Advocates for prevention are among those vying for money.

When it comes to prevention, it makes sense to target the young. Most adult smokers started smoking as adolescents.

Although the body of research is thin, several strategies show promise in steering youths away from smoking.

Restricting Access

Adolescents report having little trouble buying cigarettes, despite federal regulations requiring states to adopt laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors.

In most municipalities where easy sources of cigarettes are eliminated by vigorously-enforced local laws, both the sales to minors and smoking among young people decrease.

Common characteristics of successful laws include:

- Store owners, not just clerks, are subject to civil, not criminal, penalties for selling tobacco to minors.
- Fines are progressively more

expensive and chronic violators face having their license to sell tobacco suspended or revoked.

- Laws are regularly enforced using a variety of tactics, including the use of minors who are sent into stores to buy tobacco products as part of a compliance check.

Some laws also fine minors for buying or illegally possessing tobacco.

In Woodridge, Illinois, the percentage of regular smokers in the 7th and 8th grades fell from 16% to 5% two years after strictly-enforced laws prohibiting sales to minors were put into practice.¹ Under the anti-smoking law, sales were monitored by police, minors faced fines for tobacco possession, and merchants who sold tobacco to minors were subject to fines and suspension of their licenses to sell tobacco.

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Powerful Influences

Peer pressure and industry ads are among the factors that lead adolescents to try their first cigarette. And once they do, many become regular smokers, often into adulthood.

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A large drop in the number of stores that sold tobacco to minors and a decline in smoking among 7th grade students was seen in another study that compared two communities that tried interventions designed to restrict youth access to tobacco with two control communities that did not. Interventions included community education, merchant education, and a voluntary policy change aimed at restricting access to cigarettes.

In the treatment communities, the share of stores selling cigarettes to minors fell from 75% to 0 after three years. In the control communities, 39% of the stores still sold tobacco to minors. Smoking rates fell from 13.1% of 7th grade students to 12.6% in the treatment communities, but increased from 15.6% of 7th grade students to 18.6% in control communities.

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But no significant drop in smoking among 9th or 11th graders were seen, suggesting the interventions work best with younger children.²

Tobacco Prices

Tobacco use among young people appears to be price-sensitive to some degree. The higher the price of cigarettes, the fewer young people who smoke. Government usually manipulates the price of tobacco products through the use of excise taxes.

One study estimates that a 10% increase in the price of cigarettes generally results in a 7% decrease in the number of teenagers who smoke.³

However, research indicates that higher cigarette excise taxes may lead to greater use of smokeless tobacco – a product equally detrimental to health – among young people, suggesting that across-the-board price increases may be necessary if reducing use of all types of tobacco products is the goal.

Advertising

Tobacco industry documents released during recent litigation show that companies systematically attempted to attract young people to cigarettes through advertising.

Evidence suggests that anti-smoking media campaigns may help counter tobacco industry advertising. However, studies of the effectiveness of such campaigns on young people in particular is sparse.

The American Psychological Association has issued guidelines for designing more effective anti-smoking advertising. The APA recommends that ad campaigns:

- Provide specific counter-arguments to points highlighted in tobacco ads.

- Avoid scare tactics, such as images of death or diseased organs.
- Portray tobacco users as different from the target audience, and non-smokers as similar to the target audience.
- Inform young people that the tobacco companies are trying to control their behavior.
- Refrain from describing teenage tobacco use as a widespread national problem.

Education

Some prevention programs based in schools also show promise. They are usually most effective when conducted early – prior to 5th grade – before most children experiment with tobacco.

Effective early prevention programs usually last several years, convey culturally-appropriate information about social issues that tend to lead to tobacco use, and teach children skills to help them resist using tobacco, often through role playing, small group discussion, and opportunities for peer leadership.

Quality early prevention programs of this type have been found to reduce later smoking by 28% when program students were compared with control groups.⁴

School-based prevention programs aimed at adolescents have resulted in small, but reliable, reductions in tobacco use. Effective programs make adolescents aware of the media and social influences to use tobacco, teach skills to help them deal with the social influences of tobacco use, and attempt direct peer influences toward abstaining from smoking.

Adolescent smoking rates usually decline more when school-based prevention was combined with other interventions inside and outside of school.

Research suggests the best approach to prevention is a comprehensive one that restricts access to tobacco and encourages youth to not use tobacco using a mix of strategies, including price increases, tough enforcement of access laws, advertising restrictions, and school-based programs that make students aware of the influences that lead to tobacco use and teaches them the skills to say no to tobacco.

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This report was based on the following publication:

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