



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

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E-cigarettes Account for Highest Percentage of Tobacco Product Sales to Minors

Illegal sales of traditional cigarettes and other products continue to go down

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 12, 2019) – Kentucky continues to make progress in limiting retail sales of tobacco to minors, according to a new report from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS). The 2019 Annual Synar Inspection of Kentucky retail tobacco outlets showed 90.3 percent of retailers complied with the law barring tobacco and electronic nicotine device sales to anyone under the age of 18.

The Synar survey was completed in cooperation with the Division of Behavioral Health in the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (BHDID), as part of its federal block grant requirement. Tobacco products included in the survey are: cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and e-cigarettes. Of the three product categories e-cigarettes had the highest percentage of violations; 14.3 percent compared to 10.6 percent for smokeless tobacco and 8 percent for cigarettes.

“The results of the Synar Survey indicate we’re moving in the right direction. Through the work of our partners at the Department for Public Health and the Department of

Alcoholic Beverage Control we have been able to significantly delay the age at which Kentucky youth begin using cigarettes and tobacco products. This is so important because research shows the longer a person waits to smoke the less likely he/she is to start,” said Commissioner Wendy Morris of the Department for Behavioral Health Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (BHDID).

The Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control conducted the survey this past summer.

“Kentucky is serious about preventing tobacco and e-cigarette sales to minors,” said Carol Beth Martin, acting commissioner of the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC).

“Increased sales of e-cigarettes to persons under the age of 18 is unacceptable. Many teen users are under the misconception that e-cigarettes merely emit water vapor. In reality, they contain harmful chemicals and high levels of nicotine. Health and safety are at the forefront of preventing underage sales to minors.”

In 2004, 34 percent of 10th graders reported smoking at age twelve or younger, according to BHDID’s Kentucky Incentives for Prevention school survey data. That figure has now dropped to 11.8 percent.

“Despite efforts to keep tobacco out of the hands of minors and reduce the number of adult smokers, tobacco and nicotine remain a threat to the public’s health. At 24 percent, Kentucky has the highest rate of adult smokers in the nation and the growing popularity of e-cigarettes, such as Juul, is cause for great concern,” said Dr. Jeff Howard, commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Public Health. “The annual Synar survey is key to our efforts in keeping adolescents and teenagers from purchasing tobacco and nicotine products in Kentucky markets – but we must be vigilant about what our young people are being exposed to and mindful of the various means individuals can use to obtain cigarettes and nicotine.”

Since the inception of the federal Synar program in 1997, Kentucky Synar retail violation rates have been consistently below the national rates. The national average for all years available is 15.8 percent as compared to 9.5 percent for Kentucky. While Kentucky’s retail violation rates have greatly improved, youth still report that it is easy to obtain

tobacco products from stores and from non-commercial sources such as an older friend, sibling or parent.

“Underage youth smoking in Kentucky has decreased by 65 percent since 2004,” said Van Ingram, executive director of the Office of Drug Control Policy. “Reducing retail access to tobacco and e-cigarettes is an essential component of our prevention formula. We are making good progress but we still have a lot of work to do. We need to do more education and awareness around JUUL as their popularity among youth has skyrocketed.”

JUUL, a brand of e-cigarette designed to look exactly like a USB drive, accounts for 70 percent of all e-cigarette sales in the U.S. and has become the nicotine delivery system of choice among underage youth.

Reducing tobacco use among youth may also affect later opioid use among adults. Recent data analysis found that Kentucky middle and high school students who report they began the use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana before the age of 12 are at a 12.6 times greater risk of using opioids before the age of 17. Across the United States, similar analysis has found that those who used these substances before the age of 17 are 8 times more likely to use opioids before the age of 34.

“Upstream prevention efforts focused on early initiation of gateway substances is shown to have an impact on substance use, such as opioids, later in life,” said Patti Clark, program manager for the Department for Behavioral Health Prevention and Promotion Branch. “This underscores the importance of talking to youth early and often about the risks of any substance use in their pre- and teen years, when their brains are especially vulnerable.”

Federal law authorizes the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant and requires states to enact and enforce laws designed to reduce the availability of tobacco products to people younger than 18. The state must conduct the Annual Buying Survey using a scientific random sample study protocol approved by the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and must demonstrate that its non-compliance

rate does not exceed the target of 20 percent for illegal tobacco sales to minors. The SAPT Block Grant, administered by CHFS, is the single largest funding stream in Kentucky supporting substance abuse prevention and treatment.

To see a copy of Kentucky's 2018 Synar Report please visit:

<http://dbhdid.ky.gov/dbh/documents/sa/SynarReport.pdf?t=08362101102019>

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.