

Are the Sales Practices of Internet Cigarette Vendors Good Enough to Prevent Sales to Minors?

Retail stores are typically required by law to check ID when selling cigarettes to customers. In the early days of the Internet era, however, few states even attempted to prevent minors from buying cigarettes online. This 2002 study evaluates the precautions taken by Internet vendors to avoid selling cigarettes to minors.

Key Findings

Researchers systematically reviewed the websites of 88 Internet-based cigarette vendors.

- Although 82% of sites featured warnings that the buyer must be 18 years or older to purchase cigarettes, most relied on self-reports for age verification (for example, buyers typed in their birthdate or checked a box stating that they were of legal age).
- Only eight sites required buyers to enter a driver's license number to allow the vendor to verify the purchaser's age. Only six stated that photo ID would be required at the point of delivery.
- Zero sites had registered with parent-controlled filtering or blocking software to allow parents to prevent children from accessing the sites.

These results suggest that minors could easily purchase cigarettes online by misrepresenting their age and obtaining a money order, highlighting the need for policies to restrict youth access to tobacco products through online vendors.

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