

## **Youth Access to Cigarettes Online: Advertised and Actual Sales Practices of Internet Cigarette Vendors**

The presence of hundreds of Internet-based cigarette vendors could offer minors the opportunity to circumvent age restrictions by buying cigarettes online. This doctoral dissertation assesses the advertised and actual sales practices of these vendors as they relate to access to cigarettes by minors.

### **Key Findings**

The researcher analyzed the websites of 88 online cigarette vendors in 2000, 195 vendors in 2002, and 338 vendors in 2003. The researcher also purchased cigarettes from 101 online vendors to assess actual sales practices in the context of California's § 22963, a law designed to limit minors' access to cigarettes online.

- The website analysis revealed three-quarters of vendors featured age warnings on their home page, but most of these warnings were not formatted or located prominently.
- According to their websites, 44% of vendors relied on self-verification of age, as opposed to more rigorous forms of age verification such as requiring proof of age at the point of delivery.
- None of the 101 vendors the researcher bought cigarettes from fully complied with all six provisions of § 22963. A subset complied with two of the provisions, but no vendors complied with the remaining four.

Poor use of conspicuous age warnings, weak age verification procedures by Internet cigarette vendors, and the lack of vendor compliance with California's § 22963 indicate a strong need for strictly enforced state and federal policies to ensure that Internet cigarette vendors take adequate precautions to prevent sales to minors.

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