

Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., & Terry-McElrath, Y. M. (2004). Methods, locations, and ease of cigarette access for American youth, 1997-2002. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 27, 267-276.

Abstract

Background. The purpose of this paper is to examine trends in middle and high school students' perceived ease, methods, and locations of access to cigarettes, and to assess differences related to their sociodemographic characteristics and smoking status.

Methods. Annual data from nationally representative samples of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students were analyzed for the 1997-2002 period. Analyses were conducted in 2003.

Results. Perceived ease of access decreased significantly among never and past smokers. Decreased individual purchasing in retail outlets, as well as decreased purchasing from vending machines, were reported by 8th- and 10th-grade students. All grades reported decreased purchasing from self-service placements of cigarettes. Decreases in access were not reported across all retailer types, and no significant increases were seen in the percent of underage purchasers who reported being asked to show identification. Both gender and ethnicity were significantly related to where and how underage youth reported obtaining cigarettes.

Conclusions. Cigarette access for minors has been declining, but remains high. Findings show that (1) perceived access to cigarettes clearly increases with level of smoking, and (2) policies to reduce such access may be having an impact as evidenced by decreased retail and vending machine purchases and self-service purchases. However, states should continue to strengthen efforts to reduce youth cigarette access, especially in the areas of confirming buyer age via identification checks, and should make efforts to decrease access across all retailer types. Federal regulations like those previously implemented by the Food and Drug Administration might strongly assist in reducing youth access to cigarettes.