Is the prevalence of youth smoking affected by efforts to increase retailer compliance with a minors' access law?


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Abstract

This study correlated measures of youth smoking behavior with community-level indicators of retailer compliance with a minors' tobacco access law. The study was carried out between 1992 and 1996 in 12 communities in Erie County, New York. Retailer compliance was assessed by having adolescents attempt to purchase tobacco products in licensed tobacco-selling outlets in fall 1994 and fall 1995 after implementation of an aggressive enforcement program. Communities were grouped in two ways: (a) those that did or did not increase retailer compliance rates by 200% or more between 1994 and 1995 and (b) those that did or did not achieve an 80% retailer compliance rate in 1995. School-based surveys conducted in 1992 and 1996 assessed the tobacco use behaviors of ninth-grade public school students. Between 1994 and 1995, retailer compliance increased in all 12 communities by an average of 155%. In 1995, six of the 12 communities achieved retailer compliance rates in excess of 80%. Indicators of youth smoking behavior did not vary significantly between communities that increased their retailer compliance rates by more or less than 200%. The prevalence of past 30–day smoking remained stable between 1992 and 1996 in the six communities that achieved a retailer compliance rate of at least 80% and increased slightly in the remaining communities. The prevalence of frequent smoking decreased between 1992 and 1996 in the communities that achieved a retailer compliance rate of at least 80% and increased slightly in the six communities that failed to achieve this rate. Achieving a high rate of retailer compliance with a minors' access law appears to have caused youths to rely more on noncommercial sources of cigarettes and may have had a small effect on adolescent smoking prevalence, especially frequent smoking.