

## Oregon Tops in Illegal Tobacco Sales to Minors

Submitted by  
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Multnomah County

Nearly one in three retailers in Multnomah County illegally sold tobacco to minors last summer, according to an annual report by the federal office that funds state prevention programs. In fact, Oregon far outpaced any other state in the illegal sale of tobacco to kids.

That distinction could jeopardize the federal block grant for substance abuse treatment and prevention, which require statewide rates remain below 20 percent, officials told the

ucts on the market have exploded, in kid-friendly flavors such as Gummy Bear and Captain Crunch, officials said.

"Nicotine is a highly addictive substance, and young brains are particularly susceptible," said Dr. Jennifer Vines, a family physician who is the county's Deputy Health Officer. "We know our young people are an easy target."

She said even the youngest kids are at risk and calls to Poison Control have increased nationwide as small children have ingested e-liquid with flavors like blackberry cobbler.

"Right now this is com-

'It could mean a huge portion of our treatment and prevention dollars being taken away if we don't keep those rates down'

Multnomah County Board of Health on Tuesday, Nov. 25.

The State has so far avoided any funding cuts because retailers in other Oregon counties made fewer illegal sales, thereby offsetting the 31 percent reported in Multnomah County. The statewide rate was 22.5 percent in 2013, just inside the allowable 3-percent margin of error.

Even then Oregon retailers were caught selling tobacco to minors at more than double the nationwide average of 9.9 percent, according to an analysis of sales data reported by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

"What the number is tied to is our federal substance abuse and treatment block grant," Oregon Health Authority's Jeff Ruscoe told the Board on Tuesday. "Unfortunately that's the majority of our treatment and prevention dollars for the state of Oregon for alcohol and drug abuse. It could mean a huge portion of our treatment and prevention dollars being taken away if we don't keep those rates down."

The warning comes as an increasing number of Oregon teens also report using nicotine via electronic cigarettes — which are unregulated at the federal, state and local level. E-cigarettes are delivery devices that heat up a liquid mix of nicotine that is then inhaled. The number of e-cig prod-

pletely legal," Vines told the board at a hearing Nov.13. "All of these products are completely legal for anyone of any age."

Chair Deborah Kafoury

last week directed the Health Department to propose recommendations on how to curb the use of tobacco and e-cigarettes by minors. Health officials Tuesday addressed both how to better regulate tobacco sales to minors and

how to curb the use of e-cigarettes by teens.

Most states require vendors obtain a license to sell tobacco, a mechanism that allows the state to educate retailers and enforce laws. But not Oregon. Most states prohibit the use of e-cigarettes by minors. But not Oregon.

Last year Rep. Andy Olson (R-Albany) intro-

duced HB 4073. It would have extended current tobacco laws to prohibit sale to and use of e-cigarettes by minors. The bill failed after heavy lobbying by adults who said e-cigarettes helped them stop smoking.

'Nicotine is a highly addictive substance, and young brains are particularly susceptible'

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The North by Northeast Community Health Center is enrolling people for insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act. Enrollment coordinator Dolly England helps each client work through the forms, as she did the Bruce, above, who is coping with severe diabetes. The Center this year has been named as a recipient in the Willamette week Give!Guide, with a matching grant from Legacy Health. Make a contribution at [www.giveguide.com](http://www.giveguide.com), and find out more about enrollment help at [www.nxneclinic.org](http://www.nxneclinic.org) or by calling 503-287-4932.

"We're not talking about whether these are better for adults," Chair Kafoury said during Tuesday's briefing. "We're talking about whether they're good for kids."

Environmental Health Director Dr. Jae Douglas recommended the county ban vendors from selling e-cigarettes to minors and ban

minors from using them. She also recommended expanding the county ban their use anywhere where cigarettes are banned under the Oregon Clean Air Act. The board has already banned their use in county buildings.

Douglas also recommended the county consider how to regulate the sale of all

nicotine products.

"You've given us a lot to think about," Kafoury said. "Any policy we undertake as Multnomah County Commission really is contingent on support of all our jurisdictions. I look forward to our continued conversations about what steps we should take and when we should take those."

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