

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

CESAR FAX Readers Offer Suggestions on Why Younger Students Are Less Likely to Be Asked to Provide Proof of Age When Purchasing Cigarettes

Recent studies have found that middle school students are less likely than high school students to be asked to show proof of age when purchasing cigarettes. According to the 2004 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS),¹ less than one-third (29.4%) of middle school current smokers² were asked to show proof of age when they purchased or attempted to purchase cigarettes in the preceding month, compared to 36.1% of high school students. These findings corroborate those of another national survey of students, which was summarized in a December 2004 *CESAR FAX* (see Volume 13, Issue 50). In that *CESAR FAX* issue, we asked readers why they thought younger students were less likely to be asked to provide proof of age. Following are edited summaries of some of the responses we received.

- Younger smokers may be more likely to seek out stores where clerks are known not to require identification.
- Younger smokers are less likely to be asked for proof of age because the clerk immediately refuses the sale due to the youthful appearance of the student.
[Editor's note: Yet the NYTS and other studies have found that younger smokers are also more likely to be sold cigarettes without providing identification.]
- Clerks may not ask younger smokers for identification because they don't want to know their age and thus lose the sale.
- Younger smokers may underreport or older smokers may over report being asked for identification when they purchase cigarettes.
- Younger smokers can more plausibly state that they are buying for their parents.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Tobacco Use, Access, and Exposure to Tobacco in Media Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2004," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 54(12):297-301, 2005.

²Current smokers are defined as those youths under age 18 who smoked cigarettes on at least one day during the 30 days preceding the survey and bought or tried to buy cigarettes in a store.

SOURCE: Center for Substance Abuse Research, Responses received from an unofficial inquiry of CESAR FAX readers in the December 13, 2004 issue of the *CESAR FAX*.