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Survey: Alcohol and Tobacco Ads Target California's Children

California's kids are overexposed to ads for alcohol, tobacco and junk food. That's according to a [new survey](#) from public health departments throughout the state. They sent hundreds of teens and young adults to thousands of corner stores throughout the state to record what kinds of products and advertising they find.

Twenty-two year old Luisa Sicairos saw shelves lined with products like marshmallow-flavored vodka, fried chips, and plenty of sugary drinks in her neighborhood in San Francisco. She says the young, slim models that appear in ads next to these products and on the labels send a mixed message.

"It's still bombarding us with all this stuff on how we should look, and then they're saying, oh, but you should be drinking soda," she says.

The survey, released Wednesday, found that 37 percent of stores visited placed ads for alcohol next to candy, toys, or at eye level of a five-year-old child. Three-quarters of the stores are located within two blocks of a school and sell mint or candy-flavored tobacco products.

"They have nicotine as bubble gum," says San Francisco public health officer Tomas Aragon says this is unacceptable. "Our youth are being targeted, and so we have to fight back."

San Francisco officials are creating incentives for store owners to sell more produce and whole grains instead of chips and sodas. A new program, called Healthy Retail San Francisco, will help stores install refrigerated shelves and train staff how to buy produce for their shops.

"It's a new business model. It's a healthy business model that's good for business and good for our communities," said Eric Mar, San Francisco supervisor who sponsored Healthy Retail legislation.

Healthy food advocates say profit margins on fresh fruit and vegetables and dairy products are actually much higher than junk food. But the difficulty is in selling the inventory of fresh foods before they go bad. There is also a significant upfront cost to convert a corner store to a healthy retailer — up to \$20,000 per store. Some stores will get financial assistance through grants from the city and Kaiser Permanente.

That's how Lee's Food Mart in Bayview Hunters Point was able to afford the switch. But it wasn't easy.

"It takes a lot of time, and a lot of work," said Azmi Mubarak, produce manager at Lee's. "But our customers thank us a lot."