

# Cigarette & E-cigarette Marketing at Points of Sale Near Schools in China: 2021 vs. 2023

## Background & Methods

Exposure to tobacco marketing at the point of sale (POS) is associated with tobacco use susceptibility, initiation, and tobacco use among youth, and lower quit success rates among adults. In China, tobacco sales are prohibited near schools, although a distance is not specified in the national law. Tobacco advertising at POS is banned. In 2022, China also banned flavored e-cigarettes (other than tobacco flavored) and disallowed e-cigarette retailers from exclusively selling a single brand of product.

We assessed cigarette and e-cigarette marketing at retailers within 100m (in urban areas) or 250m (in rural areas) of middle and high schools in ten cities in China in March 2021.



## Key Results

Based on findings from this study (page 2), the sale and marketing of cigarettes (including flavored and capsule cigarettes) are widespread in proximity to schools in China. However, a reduction in cigarette and e-cigarette retailer density from 2021 to 2023 was observed—perhaps in part due to prolonged city lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 regulations on e-cigarettes also may have contributed to the decline in e-cigarette retailer density, and the reduction in flavored e-cigarette product availability, near schools.

## Implications

Recommended actions to reduce exposure to tobacco marketing among all Chinese residents, including youth, include:

- ➔ Stricter enforcement of regulations prohibiting tobacco product sales near schools, and clearer guidelines for enforcement by specifying the minimum distance stores must be from schools to sell tobacco products
- ➔ Consideration of a comprehensive POS advertising ban (including product displays, pictured above) and national requirement and enforcement of display of signage at retailers stating that sale to youth under 18 years of age is prohibited
- ➔ Research and monitoring on the extent of e-cigarette sales online (illegally) given findings from this study compared with anecdotal reports suggesting increased e-cigarette popularity in China

The same schools were revisited in April 2023.

	Schools visited	Schools within proximity to tobacco retailers	Retailers observed
<b>2021:</b>	904	538	1,612 (Cigarette) 60 (E-cigarette)
<b>2023:</b>	879	437	1,116 (Cigarette) 11 (E-cigarette)



Access our report on youth-targeted POS advertising tactics occurring near schools and playgrounds worldwide:

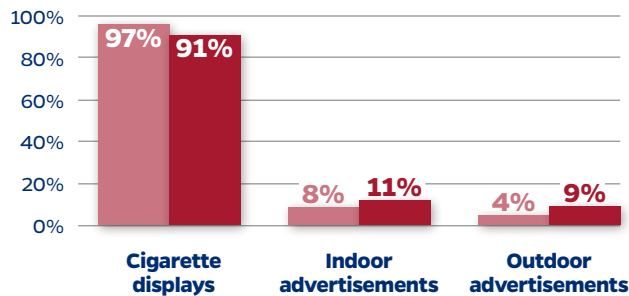
## Key Findings | Cigarettes

From 2021 to 2023, the average number of cigarette retailers near schools decreased (2021: 1.8; 2023: 1.3), however, tobacco retailers were found in proximity to 39% of schools.



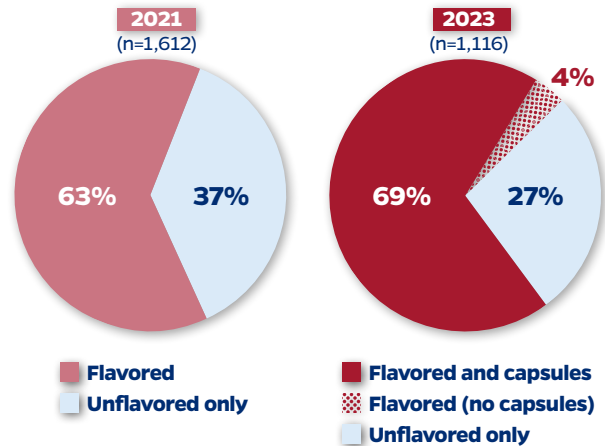
Although the percentage of retailers with indoor cigarette displays (pictured, left) narrowly decreased from 2021 to 2023, the tactic remained widely observed, and the use of indoor and outdoor advertisements increased slightly.

POS marketing tactics used by cigarette retailers, 2021 vs. 2023



As in 2021, the majority of retailers (73%) observed in 2023 sold flavored cigarettes. In 2023, 69% of stores sold flavored capsule cigarettes; this was not assessed in 2021.

Prevalence of retailers selling flavored cigarettes, 2021 and 2023



35% of retailers observed in 2023 did not display a sign indicating that sales to youth are prohibited. 51% did not display the sign in 2021.

## Key Findings | E-cigarettes

The number of retailers observed selling e-cigarettes (pictured, right) decreased from 60 in 2021 to 11 in 2023.

The proportion of e-cigarette retailers selling flavored e-cigarette products (other than tobacco flavor) fell from 100% in 2021 (n=60) to 36% in 2023 (n=4).



### Focus Group Results: “They Want to Attract Teenagers”

Evidence from a series of focus group discussions conducted among high school students in China supports more stringent enforcement of China’s current ban on tobacco advertising in public places—as well as the extension of national-level bans to all online tobacco marketing and tobacco displays, inclusive of both flavored cigarettes and e-cigarettes.

