

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

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JAMA Study Shows Kids Can Easily Buy Cigarettes Over the Internet,
Underscoring Need for Meehan Legislation to Address the Problem**

Washington, D.C. (September 9, 2003) – As a growing number of cigarette sales occur over the Internet, a study published in the September 10 issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) provides alarming evidence that the Internet is an almost completely unchecked source of cigarettes for kids. The JAMA study found that kids as young as 11 were successful more than 90 percent of the time in purchasing cigarettes over the Internet and there was little effort to verify the age of Internet cigarette purchasers either at the time of purchase or the time of delivery. Age verification at the time of purchase was usually limited to checking off a box that the buyer was old enough to buy cigarettes, and more than 86 percent of the cigarettes purchased were either left at the recipients' door or accepted by the youth purchasers without any age verification. The study, conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina, is the first to examine how easy it is for kids to buy cigarettes on the Internet.

The study underscores the need for federal legislation establishing effective safeguards against Internet tobacco sales to kids. Congress should act quickly to approve legislation being introduced by U.S. Rep. Martin Meehan (D-MA) to require effective age verification both at the point of purchase and the point of delivery for Internet tobacco sales. This legislation would require Internet retailers to verify the age of their customers using government issued identification checked against related databases and require signature and age verification upon delivery.

There are currently more than 400 Internet websites that sell tobacco products. Internet tobacco sales are growing rapidly. Internet tobacco prices are much lower than those in regular bricks-and-mortar retail outlets because Internet sellers almost never include the state taxes charged by retail stores. These low prices make Internet tobacco products attractive to both adult and underage smokers, and help to boost overall smoking levels. In addition, states may be losing hundreds of millions of dollars each year through Internet-based tobacco tax evasion.

Every day in this country, more than 4,000 kids try cigarettes for the first time. More than 2,000 become regular smokers, one-third of whom will die prematurely as a result. Restricting cigarette sales over the Internet is a critical part of protecting our kids.

For more information: Contact the JAMA/Archives Media Relations Department at 312/464-JAMA (5262) or email: mediarelations@jama-archives.org. To contact Kurt Ribisl, Ph.D., the study's author, call David Williamson at 919/962-8596.