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Tobacco Sales to Minors Rising in Chippewa County

Local Officials Urge Retailers to Stay Informed and Protect Community Youth

CHIPPEWA FALLS, Wis., June 26, 2025 – Recent tobacco compliance checks conducted by the Chippewa County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) reveal a concerning increase in tobacco and nicotine product sales to minors in 2025. These findings mark a reversal from the prior year, when Chippewa County reported zero illegal sales during youth compliance checks conducted through the WI Wins program.

The WI Wins program, a state-supported initiative that began in 2003 and has been active in Chippewa County since 2009, helps communities prevent the sale of tobacco and nicotine products to underage individuals. The program coordinates investigations using trained youth participants, in partnership with law enforcement, to ensure compliance with state and federal laws. Until this year, Chippewa County had not experienced multiple youth tobacco sales violations since 2018.

"This increase in illegal sales is alarming," said Grace VanDerhei, Drug Free Communities Project Coordinator. "We've seen firsthand how effective retailer compliance can be—especially last year, when there were no sales to minors. This year's uptick is a reminder that consistent education and vigilance are essential."

Tobacco 21 Law: A Federal Standard

Since December 2019, the federal Tobacco 21 law has made it illegal to sell tobacco or nicotine products to anyone under 21. Retailers are required to check IDs and deny sales to anyone under that age, regardless of state or local laws.

More information on the law is available through the DHS: [Wisconsin Tobacco 21 Overview](#).



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Free Retailer Training Available

To help retailers understand their legal responsibilities and avoid violations, WI Wins offers free online training at wiwins.org. The training covers ID verification, legal sales requirements, how to refuse sales confidently, and updates on changing laws. Participants receive a certificate and access to downloadable signage.

"We want our retailers to succeed and be part of the solution," added VanDerhei. "Education is a simple and effective way to protect youth and prevent nicotine addiction before it starts."

The Stakes: Why Youth Tobacco Prevention Matters

Youth tobacco use is one of the most preventable causes of addiction and long-term health problems. Nearly 90% of adult smokers started before age 18, according to the CDC. Early nicotine exposure can disrupt brain development, increasing the risk of addiction and making it harder to quit.

Teens are especially at risk—nicotine can affect memory, learning, and impulse control, and early use is linked to future substance use. With rising access to e-cigarettes and flavored products, underage tobacco use remains a serious public health concern in Wisconsin and nationwide.

"Preventing underage sales isn't just about following the law—it's about standing up for the next generation," said VanDerhei. "Together, we can ensure our kids grow up free from addiction and full of opportunity."

To learn more about youth prevention efforts or to get involved, contact the Chippewa County Department of Public Health or visit chippewacountywi.gov/ccdph.

About the Chippewa County Department of Public Health

The Chippewa County Department of Public Health is a Level III accredited agency dedicated to promoting and protecting the health of everyone in the Chippewa County. Guided by values of Partnership, Respect, Innovation, Dedication, and Equity, it strengthens public health through education, outreach, and collaboration to make Chippewa County the healthiest place to live.

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