



Sacramento Vape and Smoke Shop Investigation Summer 2026

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Background

In early 2024, Youth Forward presented research to the city's Law and Legislation Committee and the County Board of Supervisors, on the widespread sale of intoxicating hemp products in local vape and smoke shops, corner stores, and gas stations. These look-alike cannabis products often were more potent and had higher amounts of THC than what is legal for sale in cannabis dispensaries. In partnership with Breakthrough Collaborative, two 17-year-old youth leaders were able to purchase these products in several vape shops in the area. We found that many vape shops do not check age identification and sell products to minors. Youths and young adults who regularly use high THC products are at greater risk for developing mental illness, including schizophrenia and psychotic behavior, compared to those unexposed to such substances.

By the summer of 2024, the County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance to ban these products. The City took no action. Fortunately, a few months later, in September of 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom enacted a statewide ban on these products. In the fall of 2025, the Governor signed AB 8, which integrated hemp products into the legal cannabis marketplace; hemp products are now regulated by the same policies as legal cannabis.

Vape and Smoke Shop Research Summer 2026

This summer, interns at Youth Forward surveyed and researched products for sale at local vape and smoke shops within the city of Sacramento. Our research this summer is a continuation of this earlier work and is part of a statewide community-based mass participatory research project on vape and smoke shops conducted by the Public Health Institute across California with Dr. Lynn Silver as the principal investigator. This study surveys the types and prevalence of

prohibited addictive products sold at licensed vape and smoke shops and the proximity of these shops to nearby schools. According to a meta-analysis, increased tobacco retailer density near schools positively correlated with youth substance abuse (Chan & Leatherdale, 2011). Therefore, our current study helps assess the accessibility and risk of addictive substance abuse among youths in Sacramento. Our goal is to reduce harm caused by addiction and overdose in our community by identifying whether local vape and smoke shops are selling dangerous, addictive products and marketing to youth.

Methods

As part of our investigations during July of 2026, we investigated 16 vape and/or smoke shops throughout the city of Sacramento. All shops were randomly sampled from within the city limits. The investigators traveled between shops by means of a motor vehicle. Shop investigations were conducted on two separate dates: seven shops were investigated on July 13th, 2026, and nine more shops were investigated on July 20th, 2026 (Table 1). Similar to the structure of the statewide study, we also identified the distance and type of the nearest school to each shop. The school types include elementary, middle, and high schools. Notable exceptions include schools that do not follow conventional grade structures, such as secondary and K-8 schools. The distance from each shop to the nearest school is categorized into three bins, which are up to 600 ft, between 600 and 1,200 ft, and more than 1,200 ft. At each shop, we searched for the following prohibited addictive products:

Kratom and 7-OH - Kratom is derived from the leaves of the kratom plant, *Mitragyna speciosa*, which contains 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH). The substance is mainly used by crushing the leaves into a capsule and then ingesting them orally. At low doses, it promotes alertness, but at high doses, it can become sedative. Consumption can lead to addiction, and there have been reported cases of psychosis. In October of 2025, the California Department of Public Health declared kratom and 7-OH to be illegal for sale. In an analysis of the most recent data from 2022, the Center for Disease Control found kratom to be implicated in 864 overdose deaths in 30 states. In California, from 2020 to 2022, kratom was implicated in 242 overdose deaths.

Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) - Nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas, has a long history of medical use. It is inhaled as a gas and is a fast-acting sedative. Recreational and excessive use of nitrous oxide can cause serious health complications, including chronic brain damage, spinal damage, and death (*Who's Laughing Now?*, n.d.). In California, nitrous oxide is legal for medical, culinary, and automotive uses, but it is prohibited to sell, distribute, or possess it for recreational purposes, especially with flavor or in quantities larger than 8 grams (California State Senate, District 38, 2026).

Psilocybin (“*Magic Mushrooms*”) - Psilocybin, also known as magic mushrooms, is a hallucinogen found in *Psilocybe* mushrooms, which are ingested orally. This can induce psychosis, and at higher doses, psychotic behavior and death. Psilocybin was criminalized in California through a series of legislation in the California Uniform Controlled Substances Act of 1972. Other state laws prohibit the cultivation, sale, and possession of *Psilocybe* mushrooms. There are ongoing efforts to decriminalize it through therapeutic frameworks (U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, n.d.).

Intoxicating Hemp - Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, a drug derived from the plant *Cannabis sativa*. When smoked or consumed orally, THC travels to organs in the body, including the brain, where it meets cannabinoid receptors on nerve cells. Intoxicating hemp products contain lab-made THC, which forms stronger bonds with these receptors, causing amplified side effects and addictiveness. As opposed to natural THC from marijuana, side effects of synthetic hemp are 30 times more likely to result in needing emergency medical care and can be deadly (National Institute on Drug Abuse, [NIDA], 2026). With ever-changing chemical formulas, psychological and physical effects remain unpredictable. As previously mentioned, since 2024, there has been a ban on synthetic THC products sold in vape and smoke shops in California (U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA], 2020b).

Two investigators, both of whom were over the age of 21, entered shops by pretending to be customers. At each shop, the investigators staggered the timing of their entrance by approximately 30 seconds to one minute. This allowed each investigator to search a different section of the shop and efficiently cover the area while minimizing suspicion. Shopkeepers usually quickly engaged the first investigator that walked in, so one investigator often conversed with the shopkeeper while the other roamed the shop and made observations. The investigators used fabricated backstories and shopping motives designed to encourage or entice the shopkeeper to reveal or sell prohibited addictive products if they had any. For example, investigators could claim to be shopping for a family member, a friend, their significant other, etc. Additionally, they may also claim to be looking for products that helped improve sleep quality, soothed anxiety, and contained THC. We are cognizant that certain prohibited products may potentially be hidden from view unless requested, which added to the importance of asking probing questions.

The investigators spent approximately 2 - 5 minutes inside each shop. They also used their smartphone cameras to take pictures of prohibited addictive products where possible (see page 9) while avoiding suspicion. The collected data were visualized and analyzed through graphs, charts, and tables constructed using the Google Sheets and Google Documents software (Figures 1 & 2).

Results

Of the shops investigated, we found either kratom, 7-OH, nitrous oxide, or psilocybin products at over half of the stores (9 stores). Notably, two stores were within 600 ft of high schools, one store was within 1,200 ft of a high school, and one store was within 600 ft of a middle school (Figure 2 and Table 1). All nine stores selling prohibited addictive substances are well within walking distance (0.5 miles) of schools of all types (Figure 2).

Percentage of Stores Distributing Illegal Addictive Substances in Sacramento

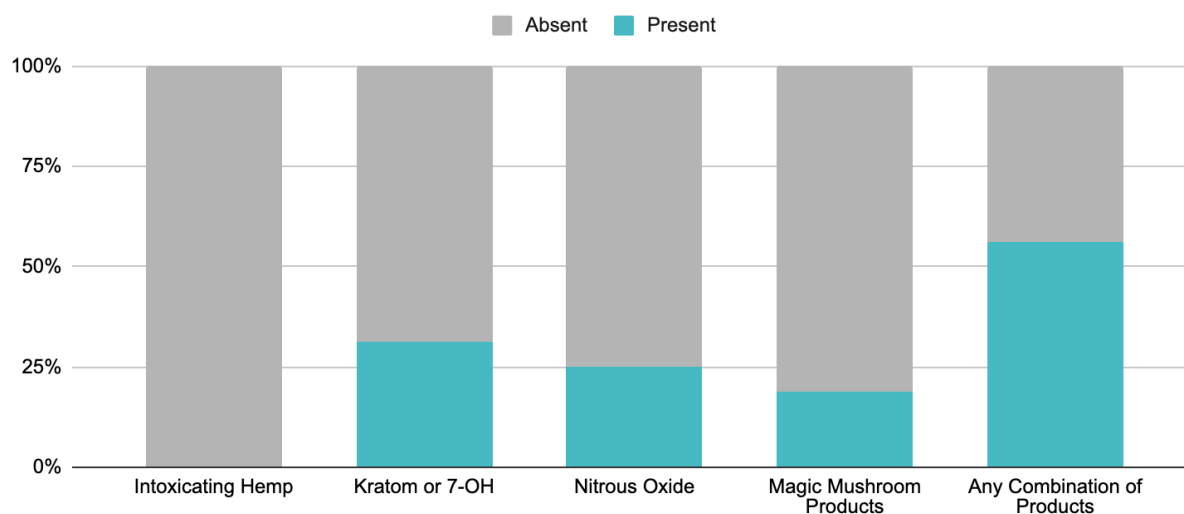


Figure 1. Bar chart representing percentages of vape and smoke shops selling illegal addictive substances within the city limits of Sacramento. No intoxicating hemp products were found at these shops; however, 31% carried kratom and/or 7-OH products, 25% sold nitrous oxide products, and 19% had psilocybin products on display. 56% of shops visited carried at least one type of prohibited addictive substance.

In shops selling kratom, it was found in powder, chewable, and/or beverage form in high quantities, highly advertised as a product to help relieve pain and assist with relaxation. Flavored nitrous oxide products were found in large canisters for sale at tobacco retailers, well over the legal limit of eight grams.

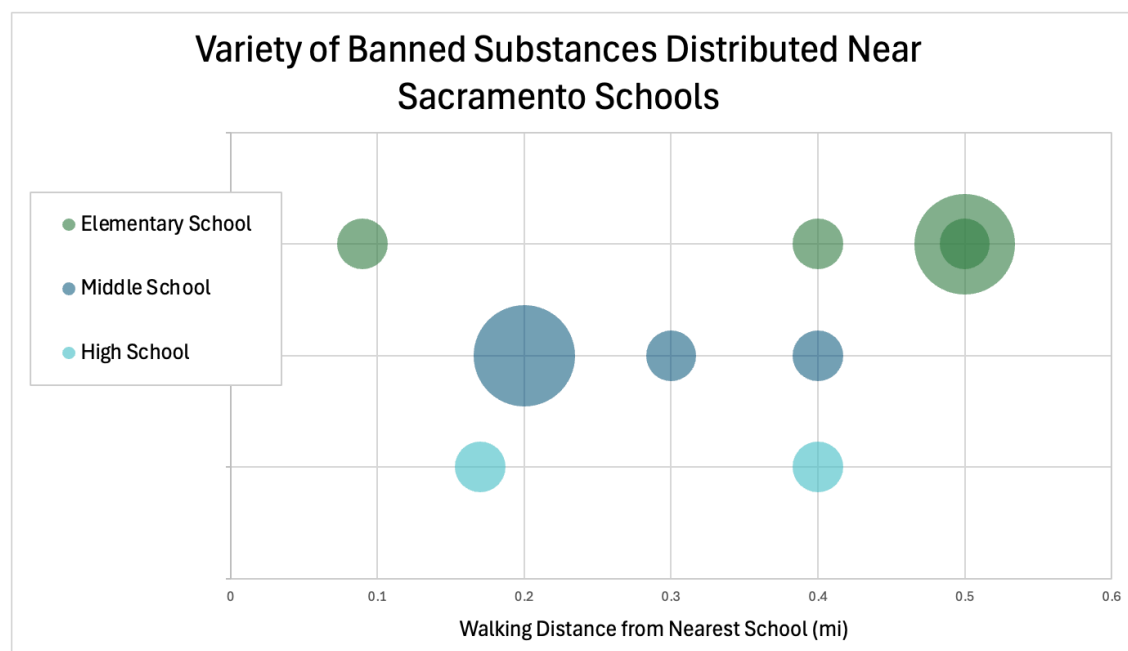


Figure 2. Scatter plot depicting distance of vape and smoke shops carrying prohibited addictive substances from schools in Sacramento along the x-axis, and ranked by school type along the y-axis. The sizes of the circles represent the number of categories (kratom/7-OH, nitrous oxide, and/or psilocybin) of illegal products sold at these shops. Small circles indicate a shop selling one category of prohibited product, and large circles indicate a shop selling two categories of prohibited products. No single shop sold all three categories of products simultaneously. The presence of multiple circles of different sizes at the same distance and school type indicates two different stores selling prohibited substances at the same proximity to a school.

Table 1. A list of the names, addresses, districts, and investigation dates of the 16 licensed vape and/or smoke shops investigated. Also shown are the type of the nearest school to each shop and the types of prohibited addictive products they sold, if any.

Key

White: carried **none** of the prohibited products mentioned above.

Yellow: carried **at least one category** of prohibited product as described above and are **more than 1,200 ft** from the nearest school.

Orange: carried **at least one category** of prohibited product as described above and are **within 1,200 ft** of the nearest school.

Red: carried **at least one category** of prohibited product as described above and are **within 600 ft** of the nearest school.

Shop Name	Shop Address and District	Investigation Date	Nearest School Type and Distance	Kratom or 7-OH	Nitrous Oxide	Psilocybin	Intoxicating Hemp
Cloud 9	2721 Del Paso Rd #120, Sacramento, CA 95835 District 1	July 20th, 2026	High school 600 - 1,200 ft	No	No	No	No
U Smoke 4 Less	2069 Arena Blvd #150, Sacramento, CA 95834 District 1	July 20th, 2026	Elementary school More than 1,200 ft	No	No	No	No
G's Cigarettes Plus	2606 Gateway Oaks Dr, Sacramento, CA 95833 District 3	July 20th, 2026	Secondary school (grades 6th - 12th) More than 1,200 ft	No	No	No	No
Little Smoke Shack	3291 Truxel Rd #22, Sacramento, CA 95833 District 3	July 20th, 2026	High school Up to 600 ft	No	No	No	No
Cigarette City Forever	3315 Northgate Blvd Suite 11,	July 20th, 2026	Middle school	No	Yes	No	No

	Sacramento, CA 95834 District 3		More than 1,200 ft				
Royal Smokey Gift & Vape	2820 Northgate Blvd Ste B, Sacramento, CA 95833 District 3	July 20th, 2026	Middle school Up to 600 ft	Yes	Yes	No	No
Smoke Shack	2345 Northgate Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95833 District 3	July 20th, 2026	Middle school More than 1,200 ft	No	No	No	No
Smoke Shop and Wireless	2601 Rio Linda Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95815 District 2	July 20th, 2026	Elementary school More than 1,200 ft	No	No	No	No
Quality Cigarette Plus	988 El Camino Ave, Sacramento, CA 95815 District 2	July 20th, 2026	Elementary school More than 1,200 ft	No	Yes	No	No
Downtown Vape & Smoke	1049 Broadway #20, Sacramento, CA 95818 District 4	July 13th, 2026	Elementary school 600 - 1,200 ft	Yes	No	No	No
Twisted Smoke Shop (Hybrid store, smoke shop combined with other retail)	3718 J St, Sacramento, CA 95816 District 4	July 13th, 2026	Middle school Up to 600 ft	Yes	No	Yes	No
Broham	4643 Freeport	July 13th,	K-8 school	No	No	Yes	No

Smoke Shop	Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95822 District 5	2026	(kindergarten - 8th grade) 600 - 1,200 ft				
Famous Smoke Shop	3022 Stockton Blvd # 6, Sacramento, CA 95820 District 5	July 13th, 2026	High school More than 1,200 ft	No	Yes	No	No
Smoke Town	6500 Folsom Blvd Media Conference Room, Sacramento, CA 95819 District 6	July 13th, 2026	High school More than 1,200 ft	No	No	No	No
Habits Vape & Smoke Shop	8391 Folsom Blvd #7, Sacramento, CA 95826 District 6	July 13th, 2026	High school Up to 600 ft	Yes	No	No	No
Cloud 9	5171 Freeport Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95822 District 5	July 13th, 2026	Elementary school 600 - 1,200 ft	Yes	No	Yes	No

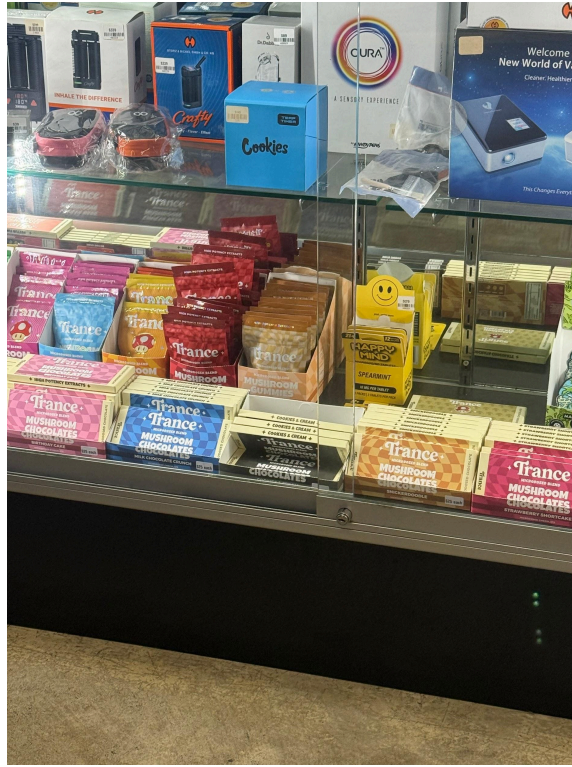
Cloud 9, 5171 Freeport Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95822, July 13th, 2026



Famous Smoke Shop, 3022 Stockton Blvd # 6, Sacramento, CA 95820, July 13th, 2026



Twisted Smoke Shop, 3718 J St, Sacramento, CA 95816, July 13th, 2026



Recommendations to Policymakers

Based on our findings, violations of existing laws prohibiting the sale of these products at licensed vape and smoke shops are not uncommon. Because kratom, 7-OH, nitrous oxide, and/or psilocybin products were found at over half of the stores investigated, there is inadequate regulation and enforcement of the ban on these products. According to Governor Newsom in March of 2026, 95% of stores have complied with kratom and 7-OH regulations, removing these substances from their shelves (Office of the Governor of California, 2026). From our more recent investigation, Sacramento stores exhibit much lower compliance than the rest of the state, as 31% of stores that were investigated sold kratom or kratom derivatives.

We therefore urge the City Council to direct city authorities and related agencies to regularly inspect vape and smoke shops, especially licensed ones, and properly enforce said laws prohibiting the sale of kratom, 7-OH, nitrous oxide, psilocybin, and other such products for recreational purposes to increase compliance rate in the City of Sacramento. Violations, especially if repeated, should carry appropriate and meaningful consequences to the vendors responsible, including penalties on their license.

We especially request stronger restrictions on the sale of nitrous oxide by licensed vape and smoke shops. While it is legal to sell nitrous oxide with the intention of culinary use and in small canisters, it is commonly purchased for recreational use and in large quantities, with little means to prevent misuse by customers. Nitrous oxide products are often flavored and its effects are quickly felt when inhaled, making them attractive to teenagers and young adults. Further regulations on the sale of nitrous oxide would significantly limit accessibility and reduce cases of abuse and misuse for local youths.

As aforementioned, the proximity of some stores to middle and high schools increases the exposure of youths to these addictive, dangerous substances, making them more accessible and increasing the likelihood of young people using these products (Chan & Leatherdale, 2011). Given these findings, we request that proximity of shops from schools be taken into account when inspecting stores and determining consequences.

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About the Authors

The authors are local young adults with aspirations to attend medical school and to participate in advocacy on health issues in their local communities. Both have lost friends and family members to substance addiction and overdose, leading them to work with Youth Forward to save and improve lives in the community by creating lasting social and political changes.

Youlin Zhu is a rising senior undergraduate student majoring in Biology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). His academic interests include biology, ecology and evolutionary biology, evolutionary medicine, physiology, and history. Outside of academics, he enjoys singing, art, photography, and backpacking. He is deeply passionate about community service, public and health policy, and advocacy for equity and justice in, and access to, healthcare. Coupled with his academic interests, this inspired his devotion to advancing community efforts and medical research in public health, including ongoing work with the UCLA schools of public health and nursing on the [Aliso Canyon Disaster Health Research Study](#). He deepened his engagement with public health advocacy and policymaking through opportunities as part of the internship with Youth Forward.

Cayla Divodi is a recent graduate from California State University, Sacramento, with a B.S. in Biological Sciences. She is academically interested in genomics, molecular biology, and developmental biology. Outside of her scholastic pursuits, she enjoys music and spending time with her animals. Driven by a commitment to community equity and public health, she aims to bridge the gap between scientific advancement and community well-being. This dedication to making a societal impact led her to work directly in advocacy and public policy during her internship with Youth Forward.