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## THE JECH GALLERY .....

### Children's exposure to tobacco

Although selling tobacco to children <16 years is not allowed, tobacco vendomats are widespread in Germany. By 2007 tobacco vendomats will be equipped with a mechanism that will make it impossible for children to get cigarettes. The technical solution chosen, however, does not guarantee the latter.

Young Germans mostly begin smoking between the ages of 11 and 16 years.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of smoking among children and youth has risen since the 90s and is now around 20% of their total population.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1** Tobacco vendomat beside a candy vendomat.



**Figure 2** Tobacco vendomat less than 10 m away from a kindergarten.

Tobacco vendomats represent the main source of cigarettes for children and youth.<sup>3</sup> On taking a short walk around the



**Figure 3** Tobacco vendomat hung about 50 cm above the ground.



**Figure 4** Tobacco vendomat close to a public playground.

quarter where I live in Hamburg, I found at least 10 tobacco vendomats placed near a school (in a radius of 200 m). Some were located right in front of public playgrounds, and others were close to the entrance of kindergartens, or a centre for youth counselling, some beside candy vendomats and some situated very low down. None of the vendomats displayed any warning about the risks of smoking, nor mentioned that the sale of tobacco to young people is prohibited.

One of the principles of health promotion is to facilitate healthy choices.<sup>4</sup> However, it should be also be to render unhealthy choices more difficult... everywhere.

Marcial Velasco-Garrido

Correspondence to: M Velasco-Garrido, Department of Health Care Management, Technische Universität Berlin, EB 2 Strasse des 17, Juni 145, Berlin 10623, Germany; [marcial.velasco@tu-berlin.de](mailto:marcial.velasco@tu-berlin.de)

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