



State and Federal Health Leaders Emphasize the Need to Combat the Youth E-cigarette Epidemic

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Smoking remains the number one preventable cause of death in America, killing nearly a half million people a year. In February 2018, data from the Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey found that Minnesota youth tobacco use went up for the first time in 17 years, due mainly to youth e-cigarette use increasing by 50% since 2014. In April 2018, the commissioners of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) wrote a collaborative letter to school administrators alerting them about the trends around youth e-cigarette use. Now, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), MDH, and tobacco control advocates across the county are urging schools, parents, communities, and policymakers to address the epidemic of youth e-cigarette use before yet another generation becomes addicted to nicotine.

On September 12, 2018, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb, M.D. highlighted limiting flavoring in e-cigarettes as one potential solution to curb youth use (access the full statement at <https://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm620185.htm>). Cigarettes containing flavorings other than menthol can no longer be sold in the United States because flavors such as bubble gum, strawberry, and frosting are seen as especially appealing to youth. However, tobacco products such as cigarillos, chewing tobacco, and e-cigarettes are still able to be sold in candy and fruit flavors. Seven cities in Minnesota, including Duluth and Minneapolis, have already taken action to restrict the sale of flavored tobacco and e-cigarette products.

Also on September 12, 2018, MDH released a health advisory on nicotine and the escalating risk of addiction for youth. Key highlights from the advisory include:

- Youth e-cigarette use has risen dramatically in Minnesota in the last three years, with an almost 50 percent increase in high school student e-cigarette use since 2014.
- E-cigarette use by youth is a major public health concern.
- Youth use of nicotine increases their risk of addiction, and can make them more susceptible to addiction to tobacco products and other substances in the future.
- MDH recommends immediate action to reduce e-cigarette use, requiring the participation of parents, educators, health-care providers, and policymakers.

In addition to the health advisory, MDH released a companion toolkit that provides talking points, data highlights, FAQ's, and communication tools. Access the full health advisory, the school toolkit, and other resources at www.health.mn.gov/ecigarettes.

To combat these alarming trends, research by tobacco-control advocates has found a number of effective strategies to limit youth exposure and access to tobacco and e-cigarette products. In addition to flavoring restrictions, other point-of-sale restrictions include but are not limited to raising the minimum sales age to 21, restricting the number, density, and location of different types of tobacco retailers near schools or in pharmacies, and increasing the cost of tobacco and e-cigarette products through non-tax approaches such as minimum pack sizes or prohibiting coupon redemption. In May of 2017 Edina became the first Minnesota city to increase the minimum sales age for tobacco and e-cigarette products to 21, and since then ten other cities in the state have passed similar ordinances. Several Minnesota cities, including Bloomington, Richfield, and Maplewood, have also raised the minimum sales price for cheap flavored cigars.

To learn more about e-cigarettes and their health risks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a quick fact guide, found at https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html. Additionally, to learn more about what can be done at a local level, please contact Carver County Public Health at SHIP@co.carver.mn.us or 952-361-1329.

