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CONTACT: Dr. Sharon Harris 516- 676-2008

safeglencove@yahoo.com

SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: The Truth About Flavored Nicotine and Youth

Researchers at The Truth Initiative maintain that since the epidemic of youth vaping began in 2018, the e-cigarette market in the United States has changed dramatically. Products are both cheaper and stronger as nicotine content has dramatically increased. Flavored products commonly used among youth continue to drive sales, defying regulations intended to curb youth use. Despite 2020 federal flavor restrictions, e-cigarette makers exploited a product loophole and continued to sell flavored products in disposable devices, which subsequently increased in use among young people.

Over the period 2019-2023, e-cigarette sales increased 47.0%. While current federal efforts to regulate the marketplace of e-cigarettes have been slow to evolve, and regulation of menthol cigarettes and flavored little cigars have stalled, individual states have developed their own flavor restrictions to great effect.

Researchers reported on e-cigarette sales sold at traditional retail outlets from January 2019 through December 2023. It also reported on state flavor policies in Massachusetts, California and New York as case studies that highlight the successes and challenges of these state laws. The findings are clear: national e-cigarette sales remain high; the tobacco industry continues to develop new products and exploit a lack of comprehensive flavor restrictions; and states are leading the way in successfully reducing e-cigarette sales and subsequent youth use.

Between 2019 and 2023:

- Flavors surged: E-cigarettes in non-tobacco flavors like fruit, candy, mint, menthol and desserts made up 80.6% of all e-cigarette sales in 2023.
- State flavor policies can be effective: Statewide policies restricting flavored e-cigarette sales can reduce flavored e-cigarette sales. Massachusetts' comprehensive statewide policy on flavored tobacco products reduced flavored e-cigarette sales by 98.2% and led to significant statewide decreases in youth access to and use of flavored tobacco products. Flavored e-cigarette sales decreased by 67.7% a year after California's statewide flavored tobacco policy went into effect and 79.1% following implementation of New York's statewide flavor tobacco policy in May 2020.
- Menthol and cooling flavors increased: Sales of menthol-flavored e-cigarettes rose 175.8% for all e-cigarettes and 207.4% for menthol flavored prefilled cartridges not covered by the 2020 flavor policy. Sales of e-cigarettes with "clear" or other cooling flavor names increased 872.1% between 2020 to 2023.

Many young people are not experimenting with e-cigarettes but are instead using e-cigarettes frequently. In 2024, 42.1% of high school e-cigarette current users reported using e-cigarettes frequently (on 20 or more days per month), including 29.7% who reported using e-cigarettes daily.

Flavors Continue to Dominate Sales and Entice Young E-Cigarette Users Flavors are a top reason why young people begin and continue using e-cigarettes. In 2024, 87.6% of current youth e-cigarette users reported

using flavored e-cigarettes, with fruit, candy and mint ranked as the most used flavors.¹³ In 2014, eight out of 10 current youth e-cigarette users said they use e-cigarettes “because they come in flavors I like.”¹⁷ Today’s e-cigarettes come in a dizzying array of flavors, from fruit, candy, desserts and chocolate to energy drinks, clove, spice and alcoholic drinks. Flavors with candy-like names and tastes naturally appeal to young people and research shows that youth perceive fruit flavors to be less harmful.¹⁹ Given the appeal and variety of flavors available, it is no surprise the majority of e-cigarette sales in 2023 were of flavored e-cigarettes. As of May 2024, concept flavors with ambiguous names like “marigold,” “artic” or “solar,”²⁰ as well as “clear” flavors that have recently crept into the market appear to be designed to evade flavor policies restricting the sale of flavored products. While naming conventions are constantly evolving, manufacturers typically use ambiguous names to elude flavor restrictions.

The Truth Initiative highlights that flavored tobacco products, particularly those with appealing child-friendly flavors, play a significant role in attracting youth to vaping and other tobacco products, leading to nicotine addiction and potential long-term health issues. They advocate for policies like flavor bans and restrictions on tobacco marketing to protect young people.

Flavor restrictions that remove all flavored e-cigarettes from the market and do not contain exploitable loopholes, combined with appropriate enforcement, can effectively reduce e-cigarette sales. Lessons learned from effective state and local policies can help inform the field and encourage continued adoption of impactful public health policies.

The Truth Initiative is the nation’s largest nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing youth and young adult nicotine addiction and empowering quitting. Research is conducted through the Truth Initiative Schroeder Institute that produces independent research to provide evidence for policy change and leadership in cessation research. For more information, please visit www.truthinitiative.org.

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention, and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. The Coalition is concerned about all combustible and electronic products with marijuana and tobacco. The Agency employs environmental strategies to educate and update the community regarding the negative consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or to learn more about electronic products visit the Youth and Tobacco Use and Vaping Facts and Myths Pages of SAFE’s website to learn more about how vaping is detrimental to your health www.safeglencove.org.