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New Survey Finds Alcohol and Tobacco Products Still More Available than Milk and Fresh Fruit

(Martinez, CA) March 8, 2017 –New research shows that in Berkeley the availability of flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, which often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate, gummy candies and even breakfast cereals have increased to 80% since 2013. This finding is part of new research released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

Effective January 1, 2017, the City of Berkeley’s Tobacco Retail Buffer Zone ordinance (No. 7,441-N.S.) established a 600 foot buffer around K-12 schools in Berkeley (as defined in Resolution No. 67,259-N.S.), which prohibits the issuance of new tobacco retail licenses within the buffer zone, and prohibits the sale of flavored (including menthol) and electronic tobacco products within the buffer zone. The City of Berkeley’s Tobacco Retail Buffer Zone ordinance is intended to protect the health of the community – in particular the youth – by decreasing the likelihood that youth will consume products that are being marketed to them by tobacco companies.

Today, throughout California, health advocates held 13 press events to the release results of the scientific survey, which is the largest of its kind. It builds upon initial research released three years ago in March 2014 and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products during this time. Information was collected in the summer of 2016 from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties including pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores as well as tobacco-only stores.

“Overall, the findings show an alarming discrepancy in our city between in the accessibility and marketing of products that promote a healthy lifestyle, and those that don’t,” said Dr. Robert Benjamin, City of Berkeley’s Interim Public Health Officer. “Stores play a critical role on our community’s health, and this survey shows offerings are out of balance, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options. Our goal is to help re-calibrate the balance toward health,” said Dr. Robert Benjamin, City of Berkeley’s Interim Public Health Officer.

The survey found the following for the City of Berkeley:

- In addition to selling cigarettes, 84% of stores sell “little cigars” or cigarillos, but only 33% of stores sold fresh fruits or vegetables. What’s more, 84% of stores sold a popular brand of “little cigars” individually for under a dollar, less than the cost of a candy bar.
- 34% of stores sold non- or low-fat milk, but nearly 51% sell alcohol.
- 77% of surveyed stores sell condoms, but only 17% sell them on unlocked shelves.

- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in Berkeley in stores from the last time this survey was conducted, up more than 15%.

“The expanded availability of e-cigarettes are of particular concern and reflect the spike in use by teens and young adults in the last three years,” said Dr. Robert Benjamin, City of Berkeley’s Interim Public Health Officer.

Another goal was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth.

“This survey found that our community’s youth are inundated with unhealthy messages and choices. We need to change what information and options our kids are exposed to and work to surround them with healthy choices and messaging instead,” said Dr. Robert Benjamin, City of Berkeley’s Interim Public Health Officer.

The survey found the following for the City of Berkeley:

- Only 10% of stores advertised healthy products on their storefronts, but 77% of storefronts advertised unhealthy products. 73% of stores near schools have storefront advertising for unhealthy products.
- More than 60% of stores place tobacco products or ads in kid-friendly locations, such as tobacco ads at “kid-level” (three feet or below) or tobacco products near candy or toys.
- More than 58% of stores placed alcohol ads at “kid-level” or near kid-friendly items such as candy or toys.
- 80% of stores sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, which often have kid-appealing flavors, such as grape, watermelon, chocolate, gummy candies and even breakfast cereals.

“The City of Berkeley is committed to continuing to work with local health advocates and partners to provide accurate information and to develop policy to help make the healthy choice the easy choice for Californians.” said Dr. Robert Benjamin, City of Berkeley’s Interim Public Health Officer.

Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community is a statewide campaign formed by tobacco prevention, nutrition, alcohol abuse prevention and STD prevention partners collaborating to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impact of unhealthy product availability and marketing in the retail environment.

Additional survey findings include:

- Alcopops are sold at 81% of stores.
- Of the stores that sell alcohol, 42% display alcohol storefront ads.
- More than half (59%) of stores in Berkeley display sugary drinks storefront ads.
- Tobacco chew is sold in 54% of stores.
- Fresh fruit and veggies are sold in 33% of stores.

For state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com.

About the City of Berkeley Public Health Division:

Berkeley is one of three California cities with its own health department. Our mission is to achieve and maintain optimal health and well-being for all people in Berkeley. We do this by working in partnership with our diverse communities to promote healthy behaviors and environments, prevent illness and injury, protect against disease and other emerging health threats, eliminate health inequities, and advocate for social and environmental justice. For more information about public health in Berkeley, visit: <http://www.cityofberkeley.info/publichealth/>.

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