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For Immediate Release:

Survey Finds Sharp Increase in Availability of E-Cigarettes in Ventura County

[Ventura County, CA] Today, throughout California, health advocates held 13 press events to release results of the ‘Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community’ survey, the largest of its kind. It builds upon initial research released in March 2014, and provides insights into changes in the availability and marketing of tobacco products, alcohol, condoms and healthy and unhealthy food options in California stores that sell tobacco.

Information was collected in the summer of 2016, from more than 7,100 stores in all 58 California counties, and included pharmacies, supermarkets, delis, convenience and liquor stores as well as tobacco-only stores. Survey results show that in Ventura County, the availability of e-cigarettes in local stores has grown by 35% from the last time this survey was conducted in 2013.

“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 Rigoberto Vargas, Ventura County Public Health Director. This finding is part of new research and highlights a continuing and alarming discrepancy in our county in the accessibility and marketing between products that promote a healthy lifestyle, and those that don’t.

“Retail stores play a critical role in our community’s health, especially among youth, and this survey shows offerings and messaging are out of balance, tipping heavily toward unhealthy options. Our goal is to help recalibrate the balance toward health,” added Vargas

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In particular, the survey found the following for Ventura County:

- In addition to selling cigarettes, 72% of stores sell “little cigars” or cigarillos, but only 36% of stores sold fresh fruits or vegetables. What’s more, 15% of stores sold a popular brand of “little cigars” individually for under a dollar, less than the cost of a candy bar.
- A County success: In Ventura County 54% of stores sell non- or low-fat milk. The State average for stores selling non- or low-fat milk is 32.5%.
- 74% of stores surveyed sell alcohol.
- In the City of Oxnard, 100% of surveyed stores sell condoms, but only 54% sell them on unlocked shelves.

- E-cigarettes saw a significant increase in Ventura County in stores from the last time this survey was conducted, up more than 35%.
- More than 24% of stores surveyed 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 25% of stores surveyed placed alcohol ads at “kid-level” or near kid-friendly items such as candy or toys.
- 81% 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.
- Only 10% of stores surveyed advertised healthy products on their storefronts, but 60% of storefronts advertised unhealthy products.

Another goal of the survey was to examine the accessibility and marketing of healthy and unhealthy products to youth. “The 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 Vargas.

Ventura County is committed to continuing to work with local health advocates and partners to provide accurate information and help make the healthy choice the easy choice for Ventura County residents.

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

About Ventura County:

Ventura County aims to be the healthiest county in the nation by 2030. Ventura County Public Health became the first Public Health Department in the state to become accredited in 2014. To reach our goal, the Board of Supervisors adopted a health in all policies approach throughout all County departments and agencies. The data gathered by the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign is important to attaining our goal.