



PRESS RELEASE Cigar Use Among Maryland Youth Threatens Gains in Tobacco Control

New State Report Details Emerging Threat

Department of Health & Mental Hygiene News Release, November 17, 2011

Baltimore, MD — The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) today released data showing that the use of cigars has increased among Maryland youth, even while the use of cigarettes has declined substantially. The Department is launching a public health campaign with a new website, www.thecigartrap.com, to highlight the dangers of cheap, flavored cigars.

The data show:

- ▶ Youth are shifting to cigars. While cigarette smoking has decreased among high school youth by nearly 40 percent since 2000, cigar use among high school students has increased by more than 11 percent during that same time period.
- ▶ Youth are attracted to candy and fruit-flavored cigars. Available cigar flavors now include strawberry, watermelon, grape, peach, vanilla, chocolate and wine. More than 76 percent of underage cigar smokers in high school smoke these flavored cigars. In contrast, candy and fruit-flavored cigarettes are not permitted to be sold.
- ▶ Youth can afford cheap cigars. Small cigars can be purchased individually, sometimes for less than 70¢, less than a candy bar or ice cream cone. In contrast, cigarettes cannot be purchased individually, and a pack generally costs \$5.00 to \$7.00 or more.

“Even as we celebrate reductions in cigarette smoking among youth, a serious threat from cheap, flavored cigars is emerging,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Secretary of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. “We do not want to see more Maryland youth fall into this deadly trap.”

“Unfortunately, our youth believe that flavored tobacco is less harmful than regular cigarettes,” said Baltimore City Commissioner of Health Dr. Oxiris Barbot. “In fact, flavored tobacco products pose significant health risks such as oral, lung, esophagus cancers, as well as heart disease and chronic pulmonary disease.”

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flavored cigars come in fruit and candy flavors. They're taxed lower than cigarettes, making them accessible to youth. They're often sold one at a time for less than the price of a pack of cigarettes. All flavored cigars, like chocolate and strawberry, contain Nicotine, Cyanide and Arsenic.

THE CigarTrap.com

“Candy and fruit flavors go best with candy and fruit,” said Frances Phillips, Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services. “We intend to spread the word about these lethal cigar products.”

The new media campaign, scheduled to launch next month, is aimed at educating parents, guardians, and community stakeholders of the dangers associated with smoking flavored cigars. The campaign will highlight that these dangerous products are attractive to youth because they come in fruit and candy flavors and are often sold one at a time for a very low cost. The campaign will include a website – www.TheCigarTrap.com – as well as a corresponding Facebook page. The ads will be placed on billboards, transit mediums, and be used in radio and print ads. The campaign is paid for by a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“Fun flavors may cover up the harsh tobacco taste, but not the addictive and deadly nature of tobacco,” said Donald Shell, M.D., Interim Director for the Center for Health Promotion, Education and Tobacco Use Prevention. “All the cancers and other illnesses associated with cigarette smoking are just as real and present in cigars. This new campaign aims to educate the public about the often life-long trap many young people fall into when they try these appealing products.”

The Department released the new data and announced the ad campaign at an event today at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School in Baltimore City, scheduled to coincide with the Great American Smokeout. Each year, the American Cancer Society sponsors this national observance on the third Thursday of November to encourage smokers to quit for at least one day, or to make a plan to quit using tobacco.

Much of Maryland’s success in reducing cigarette smoking in Maryland can be attributed to programs like the Maryland Tobacco Quitline, 1-800-QUIT-NOW. While supplies last, the Quitline is offering free Nicotine Replacement Therapy to eligible callers. Last year, the Quitline played a major role in the state’s success by offering quitting assistance to over 14,000 Marylanders. More information on the Quitline can be found at www.SmokingStopsHere.com.

The full state report, “Monitoring Changing Tobacco Use Behaviors: 2000 – 2010,” can be found at <http://mdquit.org/tobacco-use/maryland-dhmfh-reports>.

Office of Communications

Dori Henry: 410-767-3536

Karen Black: 410-767-6490



Maryland Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene