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Media Contact:

Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281

Vermont Youth Take on Flavored Tobacco

Students to rally at the State House and meet with legislators about the dangers flavored tobacco products and advertising pose to young Vermonters

MONTPELIER – Gummy bear, cotton candy, bubble gum and peanut butter cup are among the thousands of flavors found in tobacco products on the market today. Regulations ban such flavoring in cigarettes, but other tobacco-related products – including smokeless tobacco, cigars and e-cigarettes – have no such restrictions, providing marketers a powerful tool for attracting youth to harmful tobacco products.

To bring attention to these issues, students from across the state will gather in Montpelier on February 3, 2017, as part of the youth-led Our Voices Xposed (OVX) rally and march to the State House. Legislators will hear directly from teens about the impact flavored tobacco products and tobacco advertising have on youth.

OVX member Noah Smith, a senior at Burlington High School, said being a part of the target audience is a wake-up call, and that it's important for legislators and policy makers to hear directly from youth. "Flavored tobacco products come in fruity flavors that teens like and the marketing is very colorful," said Smith. "My fear is that some teens are unaware of the health risks, and that once people my age are tempted to start, they'll get addicted. The rally is our opportunity to educate our local legislators."

Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD, agrees. "Tobacco products that come in popular candy and fruit flavors are not only more enticing to young people, but they can also reduce the perception of harm. The reality is nicotine is unsafe for youth and can affect brain development," said Dr. Chen.

Studies indicate that flavored products are contributing to the rise in the number of youth using other tobacco products, particularly e-cigarettes. According to the national Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health, 81 percent of young adults age 12-17 who had ever used tobacco began with a flavored product. In Vermont, one in four high school students reported

ever trying a flavored tobacco product, and 6 percent reported trying a flavored tobacco product before the age of 13 ([YRBS 2015](#)). A 2014 audit of Vermont tobacco retailers found that 66 percent of retailers sell flavored little cigars, cigarillos and blunts.

E-cigarettes – a smokeless device for delivering nicotine – come in more than 7,000 flavors and continue to be the most popular tobacco product among youth, surpassing regular cigarettes. The 2016 Surgeon General’s Report [E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults](#), concluded that e-cigarettes are marketed to youth and young adults by promoting flavors and by using a wide variety of media channels and approaches. Eight months after the FDA extended its authority to include e-cigarettes, cigars and smokeless tobacco, the flavoring, advertising and self-service displays in stores remain unrestricted at the federal level.

There are no laws in Vermont regulating other flavored tobacco product sales, but community coalitions have been working to educate retailers and local officials about the impact of tobacco advertising. OVX youth leaders hope to elevate the issue on both the local and statewide levels. “It’s important that youth have a voice in decision making,” said Smith. “We are the future, and healthy decisions are needed for a healthier future.”

OVX is a youth-led group supported by the Vermont Agency of Education and the Department of Health. Its mission is to empower youth to get actively involved in tobacco prevention efforts. Members are involved in peer-to-peer education and support, and speaking out against tobacco industry exploitation of youth.

See the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2015 highlights and reports:
<http://healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs>

Get the facts about flavors at <http://counterbalancevt.com/about/>

For information about Vermont’s tobacco programs, visit
<http://healthvermont.gov/wellness/tobacco>

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