

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Health Department Reminds Parents and Retailers of the Dangers of E-Cigarette Use among Youth**

There have been a number of recent articles in the news following the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) announcement of an ambitious new campaign against youth e-cigarette use and increasingly aggressive policy tactics to curb the marketing of these nicotine products to youth.

While this conversation continues on the national level, the Pierce County Health Department works hard to prevent this alarming new trend from worsening among Pierce County youth. "The tobacco companies are really good at marketing e-cigarette products to kids," says AZ Snyder, Pierce County Health Officer. "Over 30% of youth who've used e-cigarettes say that the availability of flavors, like chocolate and pineapple, was a major reason behind their use. We also know that youth often believe e-cigarettes are not harmful, but that's not the case. The nicotine in the product is still derived from tobacco. Additionally, there's some evidence that e-cigarettes expose the lungs to chemicals and toxic metals. We're still not sure about the complete health impact."

The Pierce County Health Department implements regular tobacco product retail compliance checks to ensure gas stations, grocery stores and convenience stores are not selling products to minors. The program, funded by the state WI Wins initiative, partners with youth in the community to attempt to purchase tobacco products. If there is a sale, the Health Department provides education to the clerk and refers the matter to local law enforcement. "Since vaping products are regulated by the law, we are going to focus more of our future checks on e-juices and e-cigarettes," says Michelle Madsen, who coordinates the compliance program for the county. "I have teens myself, and I think parents are just not aware of all these new products

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kids are trying. Working on this program has taught me a lot about how these products are marketed to children.”

In 2017, out of the 30 retail compliance checks conducted by the Health Department, there were six sales to minors, a 20% failure rate. This is a decrease from 2016’s failure rate of 34.4% but is well above the other counties in the area. Burnett and Polk counties have 2017 sale rates of about 8%. St. Croix County’s rate was 11.7%.

“We need to do better as a county,” says Snyder. “The Health Department wants to partner with retailers, not punish them. This is an educational opportunity for us all.”

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