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**LATEST HEALTHY RETAIL SURVEY: MAKING HEADWAY BUT YOUTH ARE STILL EXPOSED TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

Stockton, CA – June 2020 – For San Joaquin County’s youth, harmful tobacco products are never quite out of sight or mind. New research, conducted as part of the statewide Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community (HSHC) campaign, reveals that youth continue to be inundated with both unhealthy messages and choices. While local retailers have made some progress in reducing the availability of tobacco products, more work is needed to better protect the county’s youngest residents.

With nearly half of adolescents shopping in convenience stores at least weekly, state and county leaders have been keenly interested in examining how products and advertising at community stores impact public health. The new HSHC survey is one of the largest of its kind ever conducted in the nation and builds upon initial research studies released in 2014 and 2017 to look at changes in the availability and marketing of the studied products over time.

Tobacco use is a leading cause of preventable death and disease in California, and nearly 9 out of 10 cigarette smokers’ first trying smoking by the age of 18. “It is no longer just about cigarettes – tobacco companies are producing a growing variety of products to attract youth and they’re spending billions of dollars on product promotions at convenience stores,” said Dr. Maggie Park, Interim San Joaquin County Public Health Officer. “Sadly, many of these stores are just blocks away from schools,” Dr. Park continued.

E-cigarettes were the most commonly used tobacco product among California high school students in 2018. Of the 262 San Joaquin County retailers surveyed — including convenience, gas, grocery, liquor, drug and tobacco stores — 100 percent sold tobacco products, with 50.4 percent also selling vaping products.

To mask the harsh taste of tobacco, the Tobacco Industry also targets kids with flavored products, making it easier for them to get hooked on nicotine. Of the San Joaquin County stores sampled that sell vaping products, an overwhelming 98.1 percent sell flavored products. On the flavor menu? Candy corn, strawberry shortcake, sour gummy worms and more. Little cigars or cigarillos are still widely available — 89.7 percent of stores sampled sold little cigars and/or cigarillos, of which 96.2 percent sold these products in various enticing flavors. These products can also be sold individually.

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One third of underage experimentation with smoking can be attributed to tobacco industry advertising and promotion. Research shows that tobacco advertising may be more influential on kids than peer pressure or even family smokers. On the exterior of the stores surveyed, 19.1 percent had vaping advertisements and 57.6 percent had other tobacco advertisements. Inside, tobacco products were visible at 95.8 percent of stores.

“Tobacco advertising shouldn’t be somewhere that’s meant to be seen by kids. Overall, we need a better balance of healthy choices in our stores,” said Daniel Kim, Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Director and *Refresh San Joaquin* Coordinator. *Refresh San Joaquin* is a local retailer program led by San Joaquin Public Health Services NEOP program. The program is designed to help retailers create a healthier balance of the availability, promotion, and placement of food, beverage, and lifestyle products (e.g. tobacco products) in their stores for the communities they serve. “We’re encouraged by some of the results in this survey and hope retailers will continue working with us to create healthier communities while maintaining vibrant businesses,” Mr. Kim continued.

For full state and county-specific data and more information on Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community, please visit [www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com](http://www.healthystoreshealthycommunity.com) or contact Tiara Johnson at (209) 468-2411.

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