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Candy-flavored tobacco resolution passes in Sarasota County

The Sarasota County Commission today, June 28, passed a resolution urging local vendors to cease the sale and marketing of all candy-flavored tobacco products. The resolution also urges residents not to purchase or use candy-flavored tobacco products in Sarasota County.

Under the federal Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, the sale of cigarettes containing certain flavors other than menthol is illegal.

“However, this policy stops short of regulating menthol cigarettes and flavored tobacco products other than cigarettes, such as cigars, snus or Swedish snuff, and hookah,” said Kisha Gaines, Sarasota County Health Department tobacco prevention program manager. “Because not all flavored tobacco products are illegal, the support of a local policy to ban all other products is imperative to protect our youth.”

Several Sarasota County youths from Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) clubs presented comments to the commission about these “starter” products, which come in a variety of appealing flavors like vanilla, orange, chocolate chip cookie dough, cherry and coffee. Downplaying their potential for addiction, these products are packaged in bold colors and typically placed at checkout counters at eye-level to many youths.

Almost 90 percent of regular smokers begin before age 18. Candy-flavored tobacco masks the initial harsh reactions experienced when trying tobacco products. However, like all tobacco products, those that are flavored carry serious health risks like lung diseases, cancers and strokes and are not considered safe by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

A March 2008 national telephone survey found that one in five youths between 12-17 years of age had seen flavored tobacco products or ads, while only one in 10 adults reported having seen them. In a local survey of 40 retail outlets, conducted by the Tobacco Free Partnership of Sarasota County, all of the gas stations, convenience stores and grocery stores sold flavored tobacco products. Gas stations and convenience stores had more flavors than grocery stores while gas stations had the greatest variety of products. All the stores were actively advertising these products.

According to Tobacco-Free Florida, overall 3.5 percent of Florida middle school students and 5.9 percent of high school students used smokeless tobacco at least once during the past 30 days. In 2009, 1.9 percent of middle school students and 7.7 percent of high school students had smoked tobacco out of a hookah on one or more occasions during the past 30 days.

For more information about Sarasota County's effort to reduce tobacco use among youth, please contact Kisha Gaines at 941-861-2805 or visit SWAT Sarasota at www.swat-sc.net.

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