New and emerging Tobacco and Nicotine Products near our Schools

(Allegan County, MI) Results from a community scan recently conducted by the Allegan County Health Department in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Community Health Tobacco Section (MDCH), indicate that there are several new and emerging tobacco and non-tobacco nicotine products being sold and marketed near our schools.

“In the past several years an abundance of new tobacco and nicotine products have come on to the market, including in our local community,” stated Amy Doeden, Health Educator. “These products are heavily marketed to young people through advertising and the use of colorful packaging and flavoring.”

We have conducted the scan in 26 venues located within 1.5 miles from schools. Scanned venues included gas stations, convenience stores, grocery stores, and others.

Among all venues scanned 88% sold newly emerging products. Snus and e-cigarettes were the top two products sold. Other products sold included cigarillos, little cigars and crush cigarettes. The products were available in a variety of flavors including “mellow”, “mint”, “frost”, “peppermint”, “winterchill”, “robust”, “citrus”, “cherry”, and others. Many retailers advertise the products with posters or banners behind the counter near the product display.

According to the most recent reports of the Federal Trade Commission on tobacco marketing (from 2007 and 2008), tobacco companies spend $10.5 billion a year – more than one million dollars an hour and nearly $29 million each day – to market their products in the U.S. The tobacco industry is marketing smokeless products as an alternative to smoking cigarettes, and portrays the products as less harmful than smoking cigarettes. However, there is no evidence indicating these new products are any safer. Quitting tobacco use or addiction to nicotine is one of the best steps that people can take to improve their health.

According to Amy Doeden, Health Educator, “The most challenging aspects of these new products is that they can be used discreetly and they are appealing to young people. The latest report from the Surgeon General warns young people can begin a lifetime of addiction to nicotine with these products, and remain at risk for all of the health issues associated with tobacco use. During this busy and exciting time as kids head back to school, we want parents, caregivers, school staff, and area youth to be aware that these products are being sold in our community, and that they are not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes.”

Local smoking cessation classes are available through Allegan General Hospital (269-686-4231), Holland Hospital (616-394-3344), Bronson Hospital (269) 341-6947, Tobacco Free Partners - Grand Rapids area (616-685-1410) and Spectrum Health (616-486-6184).

For more information on the results of the community scan contact Amy Doeden at 269-686-4580. For help in quitting tobacco use, talk with your healthcare provider or contact the Michigan Tobacco Quit line at 1-800-784-8669.