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Trick or treat? “Big Tobacco” tries to lure teens with candy-flavored tobacco products

NORTHERN MICHIGAN – For children and teens, this is a time of Halloween costumes and jack-O-lanterns filled with colorful candies. But the lure of candy can be dangerous when it’s a disguise for addictive tobacco products, according to Susan Pulaski, Community Health Coordinator for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan.

Pulaski said the latest “big tobacco” marketing strategy is geared directly at teens, and includes products like candy-flavored cigars.

“The rate of teens trying flavored cigars has increased significantly in the past two years,” Pulaski said. “Candy flavorings might make the product seem safer, or somehow more appropriate for kids. But it’s the same tobacco product, just as dangerous and addictive.”

She explained that the tobacco industry has faced heavy regulation of its products, including flavored cigarettes, but has found ways to sidestep the rules and continue targeting teens with products like “little” cigars in more than 40 different candy flavors.

“Flavored or not, tobacco is a deadly addiction that most often begins in teenage years. It remains the single largest preventable cause of premature death and chronic disease in Michigan.” Pulaski added that tobacco use may also make it difficult for teens and young adults to find work, as a growing number of employers – such as McLaren Northern Michigan – will no longer hire people who use tobacco products of any kind.

Pulaski coordinates the Tobacco Reduction Coalition for the Health Department, which has played a major role in all local school districts and several area parks adopting 24/7 Tobacco-Free Campus policies. For more information, contact her at (231) 347-5813. For free help in quitting tobacco, call the Tobacco Quitline at (800) QUIT-NOW.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties.