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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2018

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MAYOR EMANUEL CONTINUES EFFORTS TO PROTECT RESIDENTS FROM SMOKING

New efforts increase awareness about risks associated with e-cigarettes and other tobacco products

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced an ordinance to keep residents healthy and increase awareness about the risks associated with use of e-cigarettes and other tobacco products. The ordinance, to be introduced during City Council tomorrow, would enhance current efforts to curb tobacco use by requiring health-risk warning signs at the doors of all tobacco dealers and prohibiting all free sampling of tobacco products, countering decades of misleading and manipulative marketing techniques.

“Chicago has been a national leader on keeping cigarettes out of the hands of youth,” said Mayor Emanuel. “Now it’s time to step up our fight against the next generation of products that Big Tobacco uses to hook people, including e-cigarettes.”

The warning signs required by the ordinance would be posted at all public entrances of stores that sell tobacco products. The signs will be designed by Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and contain factual information on the effects of e-cigarettes and other tobacco products beyond cigarettes. They will also provide a quitline phone number that residents can call for help breaking a tobacco habit. Studies have suggested that warnings can be effective at discouraging tobacco use and increasing calls to quitlines. These messages will serve as a counterpoint to the tobacco advertising inundating customers with non-factual messages.

“Continued vigilance is required in the fight against Big Tobacco,” said CDPH Commissioner Julie Morita, MD. “Tobacco products are addictive and risky to health. We can’t stand idly by while the tobacco companies market to our youth and young adults in misleading ways. We have to limit their influence and counter their messages with the truth.”

Other tobacco products almost always contain nicotine, which is not only addictive but can itself have lasting negative effects on adolescent brain development. E-cigarettes and other tobacco products also frequently come in fruity and sweet flavors designed to appeal to youth. Marketing efforts by Big Tobacco like sampling in convenience stores or conventions also have a profound impact on youth, even if a young person doesn’t buy or receive a tobacco product right then and there. Big Tobacco has targeted the African American community in particular, and free samples are a way to hook new users.

“Cigars, cigarillos and chewing tobacco pose serious health risks and are just as addictive as cigarettes,” said Robert Winn, MD, Director of the University of Illinois Cancer Center. “Cigar use causes heart disease and cancer of the lung, mouth, throat, esophagus and pancreas. And African-American teens in Chicago are twice as likely to frequently smoke cigars as white teens. We must do all that we can to discourage young people, especially in minority communities, from starting to use these dangerous products.”

While the City has made great strides in reducing smoking, teen use of e-cigarettes and other tobacco products beyond cigarettes remains unacceptably high. Cigarette use among Chicago teens has fallen markedly during Mayor Emanuel’s tenure—from 13.6% in 2011 to 6.0% today. Yet high school students have a higher rate of using e-cigarettes (6.6%) and cigars (7.2%). According to the CDPH Healthy Chicago Survey, in Chicago in 2016, the latest data available, 18.4% of adults (18 years and older) reported smoking cigarettes and 3.0% of adults reported using electronic cigarettes. Building on the success of previous anti-tobacco programs, the City is taking further measures to reduce the use of these harmful products.

“Our enforcement efforts have successfully tightened the flow of cigarette products that were going into the hands of young people,” said Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) Commissioner Rosa Escareno, “We did it with a one-two punch consisting of the Tobacco Unit and the Tobacco Sales to Minors Team.”

As part of the City’s efforts to curb the use of tobacco products, the BACP Tobacco Unit and Tobacco Sales to Minors team conduct investigations in response to complaints of all e-cigarette retailers and vaping lounges, in addition to tobacco retailers. In light of a recent ordinance prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco within 500 feet of a high school, BACP cited 16 retailers for selling e-cigarette liquids and products to minors. Last year, the Tobacco Sales To Minors team investigated 1,237 tobacco retailers, finding 13% out of compliance and issuing 165 citations.

Distribution of tobacco product samples is one way the tobacco industry has made their products more appealing to youth. In prohibiting the distribution of samples, the City’s ordinance eliminates the legal sampling of other tobacco products at qualified adult facilities, which is not otherwise banned under federal law. Counter-advertising and limiting sampling aims to give real facts about tobacco in the face of generations of misleading information from the industry and to limit youth exposure to harmful products

This effort builds on a series of steps Mayor Emanuel has taken to stand up to Big Tobacco and reduce children’s use of tobacco products. Under his leadership, the City incorporated e-cigarettes as part of the Clean Indoor Air Ordinance, became the first big city to impose a tax on e-cigarettes, raised the tobacco purchasing age to 21, banned the sale of flavored tobacco near high schools and banned redemption of tobacco coupons, among numerous other initiatives.

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