truth initiative
freedom from nicotine addiction

Illegal e-cigarettes are being sold in your community. Here's why it matters.

Walk into any gas station or convenience store in your neighborhood and you're likely to see cheap, flavored e-cigarettes with large amounts of nicotine lining store shelves. But what you may not know is that only 45 e-cigarettes are authorized for sale by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, meaning a vast majority of products are being sold in violation of federal law. These products are part of a growing illegal market operating in plain sight in communities across the country.

Retailers and law enforcement are critical to stopping these dangerous, illegal, and addictive products from being sold and keeping them out of the hands of young people in your communities.

Why illegal e-cigarettes are a public health and safety concern

- **Nicotine is addictive, driving repeat use of cheap, disposable products that sustain a demand for an illegal market.** Disposable e-cigarettes most popular with young people pack a powerful nicotine punch and are bigger, cheaper, and stronger than ever before. The amount of nicotine sold in e-cigarettes increased by nearly 250% between 2020 and 2024, exposing youth to high levels of nicotine that can lead to addiction.
- **Nicotine addiction impacts mental and physical health.** Nicotine use can harm the developing brain and make young people more susceptible to addiction later in life, and nicotine addiction can increase stress and intensify symptoms of depression and anxiety. Because e-cigarettes are constantly evolving, new products on the market make untested ingredients like synthetic nicotine available to the public before scientists fully understand health impacts.
- **Sales of illegal e-cigarettes raise broader community health and safety concerns.** Young people who use e-cigarettes are more likely to use other tobacco products like cigarettes and little cigars. Nicotine is also often one of the first substances used by young people and may open them up to using other substances like alcohol and cannabis. Nicotine use in early adolescence may also lead to higher odds of engaging in risky driving, sexual activity, and violence-related behaviors.

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- **Marketing appeals to young people.** Many e-cigarette brands intentionally use bright colors, cartoon characters, fun flavor descriptions, and toy-like packaging to appeal to young people. High-tech "smart" vapes with screens, games, and Bluetooth connectivity became top-selling products in 2024.
- **Tobacco retailers are close to schools.** More than three-quarters of public schools are within a 10-minute walk of at least one outlet selling tobacco, providing children with easy access to highly addictive nicotine products.
- **E-cigarettes damage the environment.** Littered disposable e-cigarettes introduce plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals, and flammable lithium-ion batteries into streets, parks, yards, and waterways, impacting your communities directly. E-cigarette waste does not biodegrade even under severe conditions. Because e-cigarette manufacturers do not tell consumers how to dispose of their e-cigarettes responsibly, e-cigarette waste presents a serious environmental problem.

Stopping illegal e-cigarette sales protects young people and strengthens community health and safety

Federal, state, and local laws regulating e-cigarette sales are only as effective as their adherence and enforcement. Removing illegal products from store shelves disrupts illegal supply chains and reduces access for underage users.

Law enforcement officers working to pull illegal products off store shelves are protecting young people from a potential lifelong nicotine addiction. Likewise, retailers who stand firm in refusing to stock or sell illegal products are choosing to protect youth in their communities, prioritizing people over profits.

Here's how to tell which e-cigarettes should not be sold:

- The FDA has a list of e-cigarettes authorized for sale in the U.S.
- Some states have lists outlining which products can or cannot be sold there. For example, Florida has a list of illegal nicotine products that are attractive to children.

Proactive enforcement and retailer compliance can reduce illegal sales, protect the health of our nation's young people, and strengthen community safety.

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