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New Campaign Empowers Youth and Young Adults to “Unfriend” Tobacco and Flavored Vape Products

Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) today launched the “Unfriend Tobacco: Your Lungs, Your Rules” tobacco use prevention and cessation campaign to raise awareness among youth and young adults about the harmful effects of using flavored vape and other tobacco products. The campaign encourages individuals to make healthier lifestyle choices.

The campaign is serving ads on streaming audio and social media apps and took inspiration from a concept familiar to the target audience. The now-common verb “unfriend,” was added to the Merriam Webster Dictionary in 2003, and is defined as “to remove someone from a list of designated friends on a person's social networking website.” The campaign calls for youth and young adults to “unfriend” tobacco products to remove the physical, emotional and social impacts such products could have on their lives.

“Despite the advancements that have been made in suburban Cook County, through the passing of Tobacco 21 and sales restriction of flavored liquid nicotine products, tobacco use remains the largest preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the U.S.,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “With this campaign, we aim to build on this progress and foster a healthy, thriving Cook County.”

Research has shown youth and young adults – especially those who are Black, Latinx and LGBTQ+ – have been predatorily targeted by tobacco companies and are consequently at risk of forming dangerous addictions to harmful tobacco products, including cigarettes, electronic cigarettes (also known as e-cigs or vapes), cigarillos, hookah and smokeless tobacco.

In 2022, more than 2.5 million U.S. middle and high school students stated that they currently used e-cigarettes. Of those, 85 percent used flavored products, which play a key role in attracting youth to start using vape products and increase the likelihood they will become regular smokers. Flavored vapes and menthol cigarettes mask the harshness of smoking and make cigarettes more addictive, making it easier to start smoking and harder to quit.

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"In our health system, we've witnessed the negative toll tobacco use has taken on the lives of Cook County residents," said Cook County Health Interim CEO Dr. Erik Mikaitis. "Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body and causes numerous chronic health conditions, such as asthma, cancer, heart disease, stroke and COPD. To prevent the next generation from experiencing these devastating health effects, we must reach them with relevant messages and education early."

More than 480,000 Americans and over 18,000 Illinoisans die from tobacco-related illnesses every year.

The Unfriend Tobacco campaign will be in market through the end of June. The ads feature a diverse group of teens and young adults engaging in healthy behaviors. One ad says, "With each inhale, choose health," and shows a teen playing basketball instead of using tobacco.

This campaign will help all students, but especially those from under-resourced communities, who want to quit. Youth will connect to free cessation resources, including access to certified Quitline counselors," said Cook County Commissioner Dr. Dennis Deer, Chair of the Cook County Board's Health & Hospitals Committee.

"Preventing tobacco and vaping use now will undoubtedly save lives in the future," said Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller, who sponsored a ban on the sale of flavored liquid nicotine products in April 2023.

"Tobacco prevention education is a mainstay program for local public health," said CCDPH Chief Operating Officer Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck. "This is such an important topic, that we recently featured it in our Public Health Heroes League campaign, which launched in March. In [Episode 2](#), Smoke and Mirrors, the league stops the illegal sale of flavored vape products to minors."

Join the community that's breathing easier and living better, every day. Visit unfriendtobacco.com, call 1-866-QUIT-YES or text "Start my Quit" to 36072 for info and support.

CCDPH is the nationally accredited, state-certified local health department serving 2.3 million residents and 127 Cook County suburbs. This project was made possible by funds received from the Illinois Department of Public Health.

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