



Capital District  
Tobacco-Free  
Communities

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## **Fifth Annual Seen Enough Tobacco Day Highlights the Need to #FinishFlavors**

*Flavored tobacco products are the starter kit to a lifelong nicotine addiction*

ALBANY, N.Y.- On October 13, 2021, Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities (CDTFC) and youth-led Reality Check of New York are highlighting the alarming fact that the average age of a new smoker in New York is 13 years old. This is due largely, in part, to the billions of dollars that the tobacco industry spends each year to make their deadly products affordable, accessible and appealing to kids.

In May 2020, when New York state ended the sale of flavored e-cigarettes, including menthol, it was a significant step toward what the U.S. Surgeon General had declared to be a nationwide epidemic of youth e-cigarette use. The rate of high school e-cigarette use in New York peaked at 27.4% in 2018.

Remaining on the shelves, however, are menthol cigarettes, along with cigars, cigarillos, and smokeless tobacco in a wide variety of candy and fruit flavors that continue to attract young users. CDTFC staff recently visited 21 tobacco retailers in Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady counties and found that while most stores had complied with the law prohibiting the sale of flavored e-cigarettes, all of them sold menthol cigarettes and a wide assortment of other flavored tobacco products.

**“There is still no shortage of – “sweet, cheap and easy to get” – flavored tobacco products in our communities. You can still purchase a 5 for \$1 pack of Watermelon or ‘Wet and Fruity’ SHOW brand cigarillos or a ‘Black & Mild Sweet’ cigar for 79 cents. It shouldn’t come as a surprise that the most recent data from the NYS Youth Tobacco Survey shows that two and half times as many youth are using these other tobacco products than are using cigarettes,”** said Jeanie Orr, Program Manager, Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities.

According to the latest [New York State Youth Tobacco Survey](#), youth tobacco use decreased from 2018 to 2020 in every category of tobacco product: cigarettes, e-cigarettes and other tobacco products. This good news is tempered by the fact that 1 in 4 high school students still uses some form of tobacco product and 22.5% use e-cigarettes, a rate which is still higher than the 2016 rate. Overwhelmingly, youth use flavored tobacco products which have been found to make it easier for them to start and harder to quit.

**“Think of flavored tobacco products as the industry’s starter kit for kids,”** said Dr. Gus Birkhead, Policy and Advocacy Chair, New York State Public Health Association. **“The industry knows that 90% of adult smokers started before age 18. They have to make their products appealing to kids in order to hook the next generation of smokers and protect their bottom line. New York state and some local**

**communities have taken a lot of important steps to stop the industry in their tracks, but we can and need to do more,”** said Birkhead.

To learn more about Seen Enough Tobacco Day, visit [seenenoughtobacco.org](http://seenenoughtobacco.org).

**About Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities (CDTFC)** is a NYS Bureau of Tobacco Control grant-funded program held by St. Peter’s Health Partners. CDTFC works to increase support for New York state’s tobacco-free norm through youth action and community engagement. Efforts are evidence-based, policy-driven, and cost-effective approaches that decrease youth tobacco use, motivate adult smokers to quit, and eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Visit [www.smokefreecapital.org](http://www.smokefreecapital.org) for more information.

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