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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**New data shows young people in Riverside County are targeted by unhealthy messages in retail stores**

***The first and largest survey of its kind in California analyzing tobacco, alcohol and food in stores***

Health officials have stressed the importance of healthy choices for young people in Riverside County, but the youngsters are also bombarded constantly by unhealthy messages as they shop at local markets and convenience stores. This information is part of new data released today on the availability and marketing of tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy and healthy food products in stores that sell tobacco.

It is the first time all three categories of products have been analyzed together.

“Our message has always been that young people, if given the option, will often choose the healthy choice when it comes to what they consume. But the healthy option is hard to hear when it is drowned out by the constant bombardment of those who target young people with unhealthy choices,” said Susan Harrington, director of the Riverside County Department of Public Health. “We are committed to working with retailers, partners and parents throughout Riverside County to protect our kids and make our communities healthier. We all must be educated about how the places we shop are influencing unhealthy behaviors.”

Among the findings in the report, nearly 80 percent of stores surveyed in Riverside County have unhealthy outside advertising; more than 60 percent sell electronic cigarettes and almost 70 percent offer chewing tobacco; 78 percent of the stores surveyed sell alcohol, yet only 35 percent sell low or non-fat milk; and nearly 80 percent of stores sell alcopops, which have an alcohol content between 5-12 percent alcohol and include such flavors as “slushies,” “pomegranate fizz” and “sky blue.”

Officials noted that adults are often desensitized to the unhealthy advertising and products in stores, but that research indicates that young people are highly influenced by marketing of products like tobacco and alcohol, even more so than peer pressure.

The findings also show that electronic cigarettes are widely available in Riverside County, alarming health officials and community partners. More than 60 percent of stores sell e-cigarettes in Riverside County. Statewide, the number of stores selling e-cigarettes quadrupled in the last two years, from 11.5 percent in 2011 to 45.7 percent in 2013. The long-term health effects of electronic cigarettes are unknown and many contain nicotine, which is highly addictive.

Health advocates up and down the state released the survey results today, with 13 press events taking place simultaneously throughout California. The large survey collected information from more than 7,300 diverse retail stores – including convenience, supermarket, liquor, tobacco, small market, discount, drug and big-box stores – in all 58 counties, with the goal of shedding light on what products are available and promoted in our communities.

The survey includes state, regional and county level data with new insights on the density of stores selling tobacco and their proximity to schools; types of tobacco and alcohol products being sold; advertising and placement of such products in stores; the availability of e-cigarettes; and the availability and promotion of unhealthy and healthy food options including low- or non-fat milk and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Today's data release also marks the launch of *Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community*, a statewide campaign – formed by tobacco prevention, nutrition and alcohol prevention partners working in collaboration – to improve the health of Californians by informing them about the impacts of unhealthy product marketing in the retail environment.

For state, regional and county specific data and more information on *Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community*, visit [www.HealthyStoresHealthyCommunity.com](http://www.HealthyStoresHealthyCommunity.com).

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