**So what’s the deal with flavors in e-cigarettes?**

Many communities across the state of Minnesota already limit the sale of tobacco products, but only a few have banned flavored tobacco products altogether. Edina, Bloomington and Moorhead are just a few of municipalities that have taken a strong stance and banned all flavored tobacco products. Communities like Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth currently only allow for the sale of flavored tobacco products in adult only stores. And yet youth are still getting their hands on flavored e-cigs.

It is important to point out that flavored e-cigarettes are marketed specifically to appeal to youth. Evidence shows that youth are drawn to the sweet flavors that are designed to mimic candy and fruit. Big tobacco also uses brand recognition as a tactic, for instance taking a kids cereal like Fruity Pebbles and using the name and image to create a flavor profile, appealing directly to youth. The flavors are often the reason youth first try vaping. They are curious.

Flavors are often divided into 3 categories, fruit, sweet or cooling. However a 4th category has emerged, blended flavors. An example of this is the ever popular mango ice flavor. This is a combination of the sweet mango fruit and menthol. The addition of the menthol has a very specific role, it cools and covers up the harsh and irritable effects of vaping. The flavor hides the bitter taste of nicotine and numbs the burning sensation as it is absorbed into the soft tissue of the lungs. Thus, counterbalancing a barrier that may otherwise prevent youth and young adults from using high potency nicotine.

Despite the best efforts of our communities, youth are still accessing flavored devices. Many continue to get products from friends, older young adults and even online retailers. Advocates and coalitions throughout the state continue to work to educate communities and create safeguards for youth and young adults. Please continue talking to your teens about vaping. Feel free to reach out to Candi Davenport at cdavenport@relatemn.org for additional resource and support.