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News Release

Big Tobacco Puts Deadly Drug in Prettier Packages

(SALT LAKE CITY) – Some look like candy and mints, others like toothpicks. Then there are the dissolvable strips you’d swear are breath fresheners. But inside, they’re still just cancer-causing tobacco, wolves in sheep’s clothing that will entice and hook new, young smokers and keep current smokers addicted.

At a news conference today, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) helped the public understand just how insidious the new products are. Faced with a growing number of quitters, big tobacco is now offering nicotine that doesn’t need to be smoked or chewed: some of the new products melt quickly in your mouth and deliver nicotine straight to the bloodstream. Others are shaped like breath mints and come in eye-catching tins that hide easily in a pocket.

“As comprehensive tobacco control efforts help to lower use, the industry quickly responded by developing new ‘tobacco candy’ products to maintain their profits at the expense of public health,” said Amy Sands, program manager for the UDOH Tobacco Prevention and Control Program (TPCP). “These products are designed to make tobacco addiction more accessible as well as to promote the dual use of cigarettes and smokeless products, creating an even stronger addiction.”

“Because these products were brought to market very quickly, there’s limited research about their long-term effects,” said University of Utah Health Care pediatrician Ellie Brownstein, M.D. “What we do know is that they have a high nicotine content and could be very deadly to a child who thinks he’s picking up a piece of candy.”

Kathy Baebler, Salt Lake Valley Health Department health educator, pleaded with parents today to be aware of the products and their harmful effects. “The slick packaging makes the products appealing to children,” said Baebler. “Teachers, too, need to be aware that they are very likely to be making their way to the classroom. So it’s critical to remind students that there is no safe tobacco product.”

Tobacco prevention and control efforts in Utah are working, but much more needs to be done. Tobacco use in Utah costs taxpayers \$369 million in smoking-related medical expenses and \$294 million in lost productivity each year. Cost-effective anti-tobacco programs and quit services pay for themselves through the resulting health and economic benefits for the state. In addition to saving lives, each percentage point reduction in the smoking rate equals savings of \$315 million in future health care costs.

For free information or to get help quitting, call the Utah Tobacco Quit Line at 1.888.567.TRUTH or visit www.utahquitnet.com.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.