



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MAYOR EMANUEL CRACKS DOWN ON THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY OVER MARKETING OF MENTHOL TOBACCO IN CONTINUING EFFORTS TO REDUCE TOBACCO USE AMONG YOUTH**

*Tobacco Giant R.J. Reynolds Cited for Alleged Distribution of Tobacco Coupons Without a License; Board of Health Launches Town Hall Meetings to Consider Further Action*

As part of his overall campaign to curb youth smoking, Mayor Rahm Emanuel today went after the tobacco industry to curb marketing practices that target youth. This call for action comes on the heels of a cease and desist and several notices of violation issued by the City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) against tobacco giant R.J. Reynolds for the alleged distribution of tobacco coupons without a license. The City and Board of Health will investigate these practices further and consider additional actions the City can take to combat them through a series of Town Hall meetings that will take place in September.

"Flavored tobacco is a leading gateway to smoking addiction for our youth, which is why we must come together as a community to protect our young people from what too often becomes a lifelong and life threatening habit," said Mayor Emanuel, "The City of Chicago will continue to pursue action against the tobacco industry as we look for innovative ways to eliminate menthol use among our youth. I will work with the Board of Health and Chicagoans from across the city to expand our efforts to combat youth smoking."

BACP issued a notice of violation to R.J. Reynolds for the alleged distribution of discount coupons for menthol tobacco products without the appropriate license. The coupons allowed for the purchase of tobacco products for one dollar, an up to 90% percent discount from their retail price, and were distributed at a Lakeview bar on August 11th 2013. The City is investigating whether the company or its agents distributed any coupons at other locations and will continue to investigate illegal tobacco activities. In other efforts to protect Chicago's youth, BACP has closely monitored and taken enforcement actions against businesses that sell tobacco to minors, with increased enforcement in safe passage zones.

Distribution of the coupons took place after Mayor Emanuel's call to the Chicago Board of Health to investigate the impact of flavored tobacco, including menthol, on Chicago youth. At its August public meeting, the Board will consider a resolution to hold four Town Hall meetings to solicit input from the public as it considers additional policy options for reducing youth smoking.

The town hall meetings will be held from 6:30-8:00 p.m. on:

121 NORTH LASALLE STREET, ROOM 507, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

- September 5 (Chicago State University, 9501 S. King Drive, Chicago, IL 60628)
- September 10 (General Robert E. Wood Boys & Girls Club, 2950 W. 25<sup>th</sup> St., Chicago, IL 60623)
- September 17 (Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St., Chicago, IL 60613)
- September 19 (Austin Town Hall Park, 5610 W. Lake St., Chicago, IL 60644)

Following the town hall meetings, the Board of Health and Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) will release a comprehensive report detailing feedback from participants, including youth, as well as policy recommendations from public health professionals, scientists and other content experts to help Mayor Emanuel create a more comprehensive public health strategy.

“Menthol-flavored cigarettes have affected generation after generation of youths in Chicago and addressing the issue now is critically important to the health of our city,” said Dr. Bechara Choucair, Commissioner of CDPH. “With minority populations so disproportionately targeted by the tobacco industry, this is truly a matter of health justice and equity.”

In a letter to the Board on July 25, Mayor Emanuel highlighted the particular dangers menthol-flavored cigarettes pose to young people. Specifically, among African American youth ages 12-17 who smoke, 72 percent use menthol-flavored cigarettes. The numbers are nearly as high for LGBT and Asian American youth (71 percent for both groups) who smoke. In addition, nearly 50 percent of Latino youth who smoke use menthol-flavored cigarettes.

Furthermore, if smokers begin the habit before age 18, they are 75 percent more likely to smoke as adults. Put simply, menthol-flavored cigarettes attract youth who would not otherwise be smokers, and taking action to limit their use will have a positive effect on the community as a whole. Derived from the peppermint plant, menthol provides a deceptively minty flavor and cooling sensation in cigarettes, covering up the tobacco taste and reducing the throat irritation associated with smoking, particularly among first-time users.

“Big tobacco is using menthol-flavored cigarettes to turn our children into lifelong addicts,” said Dr. Carolyn Lopez, president of the Board. “By passing this resolution today, the Board stands with parents and youth across the city to help stop this problem and protect our families. Together, we will help ensure our youth have the opportunity to grow into healthy adults.”

This fall, CDPH’s Tobacco Prevention and Control program will launch a public awareness campaign that focuses on menthol-flavored cigarette use. These programs are part of Mayor Emanuel’s call to action under the City of Chicago’s Public Health agenda entitled “Healthy Chicago.” This is the first-ever comprehensive plan for public health put forth by the City and it continues to serve as a blueprint for a focused approach by CDPH to implement policies and systems changes to priorities and transform the health of Chicago.

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