



August 21, 2014

Mayor Chris Coleman and Members of the Saint Paul City Council
Saint Paul City Hall
15 Kellogg Blvd West, Suite 310
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mayor Coleman and Members of the City Council:

As the Commissioner of Health for the State of Minnesota, I am deeply concerned about the use of tobacco among youth. Tobacco use remains the number one cause of preventable death. An estimated 102,100 Minnesota youth are projected to die from smoking. Despite the economic costs and lives lost due to tobacco use, the tobacco industry continues to market cheap, flavored tobacco products to youth. I am pleased to see the city of Saint Paul taking a stand to eliminate the sale of cheap cigars.

Minnesota has made great progress reducing tobacco use among youth in the past decade. Cigarette use among Minnesota high school students has decreased significantly since 2000; unfortunately, there has been little change in the percentage of students smoking cigars, cigarillos, and little cigars. Lack of regulation and availability of cheap and flavored cigar products makes them attractive to youth, leading to a lifetime addiction.

According to the 2013 Minnesota Student Survey:

- 4.6 percent of Minnesota 9th grade students and 9.6 percent of 11th grade students smoked cigars, cigarillos or little cigars on one or more days in the past 30 days.
- American Indian students (8.8 percent of 9th graders and 14.1 percent of 11th graders) have the highest rate of cigar use of any racial-ethnic group.
- Among 11th grade males, the percentage smoking cigars, cigarillos and little cigars is now higher than the percentage smoking cigarettes.

The 2014 Surgeon General's Report identifies raising the price of tobacco as an effective method for reducing tobacco use, especially among youth. Cigars, cigarillos, and little cigars are sold in a variety of candy or fruit flavors, and individually or in packs of 2 to 6, which keeps prices low and accessible to young people and other price-sensitive buyers. These products are widely available in Minnesota. According to an assessment of 24 stores in Saint Paul in the spring of 2013, nearly four of every five licensed tobacco retailers sold flavored little cigars and cigarillos. Nearly four of every five stores sold cigars or cigarillos in packs of three or less. Across stores, a single cigar sold for an average of \$1.08. The cheapest single cigar sold for only \$0.50. I applaud the city of Saint Paul for considering this bold action to stop the tobacco industry from targeting youth with cheap, yet deadly tobacco products.

The city of Saint Paul has the opportunity to improve the lives of youth and prevent another generation from tobacco addiction. Together we can make it easier for young people to live healthy lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward P. Ehlinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Edward P. Ehlinger, MD, MSPH
Commissioner