



Sheila Dixon

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Mayor Dixon and the Baltimore City Health Department
Propose Ban on Sale of Single, Cheap Cigars**

Baltimore, MD (May 28, 2008) – Mayor Sheila Dixon was joined by Baltimore City Health Department Commissioner Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, elected officials and health advocates to propose a new regulation to ban the sale of individual cigars. The sale of these single, cheap cigars poses major public health risks.

“Our goal is to make Baltimore a healthier city,” said Mayor Sheila Dixon. “The sale of these cigars fosters smoking by young people and can lead to a lifetime of addiction and disease.”

These cigars are sold for as little as 69 cents each in stores across Baltimore in a wide variety of flavors. The products encourage smoking by youth and young adults who are especially sensitive to the price of tobacco products. A recent study by Johns Hopkins University found that 23.9 percent of youth ages 18 to 25 smoked cheap cigars in the last 30 days.

Cigars generally have nicotine levels and tobacco amounts much higher than cigarettes. They are associated with similar health risk as cigarettes, leading to increased risks of heart disease, cancer and lung disease.

Under the proposed regulation, retailers would be required to sell cigars in packs of five. The proposal exempts cigars with a wholesale cost of two dollars or more, as well as cigars sold in tobacco shops.

The Mayor and the Health Department believe the sale of such cigars undermines efforts to inform the public about the health risks of smoking. Single, cheap cigars generally do not carry health warnings, and consumers can be misled about the health risks of smoking.

“In Baltimore and around the country, cigarettes cannot be sold individually without health warnings,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner of Health. “This proposal applies a similar standard to cigars.”

The individual sale of cheap, flavored cigars threatens to undermine recent gains in reducing youth smoking. Across the country, including Baltimore, youth smoking has declined in recent years. However, the easy accessibility of low-cost alternatives, without any health warnings, could undermine these gains.

“These products contribute to a serious and growing health problem in Baltimore City, and indeed, across the State,” said Professor Kathleen Dachele, Director of the Center for Tobacco Regulation at the University of Maryland School of Law. “This common-sense regulation will improve public health.”

The Health Department is soliciting comments on the proposed regulation, which can be found on the Health Department’s website at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org>.

Please send comments to Baltimore City Health Department, 210 Guilford Avenue, Baltimore MD 21209, Attention: Rianna Brown.

Public comment will be received through July 1, 2008.

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