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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Limiting Youth Access to Tobacco Through Compliance Checks**

Millersburg, OH –

Approximately 8.1% of United States high school and middle school students reported current use of a tobacco product in 2024. E-cigarettes, or vapes, are the most common tobacco product used by young people since 2014. 5.9% of students reported the current use of e-cigarettes in 2024. An additional 1.8% of students use nicotine pouches and 1.4% use cigarettes.

17.7% of young people in Holmes and Wayne Counties who used e-cigarettes in the past 30 days purchased their e-cigarettes from a store. (This information was gathered from the 2022-2023 Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey.) As of October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, it is illegal to sell tobacco or vaping products to anyone under the age of twenty-one in Ohio. This includes all nicotine products.

Between December 2024 and April 2025, twenty compliance checks took place in Holmes County. This ensures the Tobacco 21 law is being followed and access to tobacco products by youth is limited. In Holmes County, there are twenty-five retail stores that sell tobacco products. The majority are convenience stores (52%) and discount stores (20%). Over half, 56%, are located within Millersburg. The tobacco compliance checks were conducted with the assistance of young adult volunteers.

One in four Holmes County retail stores sold to a minor under age 21 during the compliance checks. The county's overall compliance rate is 75.0%, with fifteen stores complying with the Tobacco 21 law. Recent updates to the law in Fall 2024 require that all retailers must verify, with photo identification, the age of anyone appearing under the age of thirty who is attempting to purchase tobacco products. A "compliant store" is defined

as a store that did not sell a tobacco or nicotine product to the volunteer. All compliant stores asked for and examined the underage purchaser's ID and most (73.3%) used age-verification equipment to verify age. Among the five stores that sold, the underage purchaser's ID was asked for and examined at three of the stores. One of these stores also used age-verification equipment.

All stores received letters that informed them that a compliance check took place and if the store was compliant with the law. Non-compliant stores received additional information on Tobacco 21 and resources for employee training. Additionally, six stores did not have signs meeting the guidelines of the Tobacco 21 law. These stores also received age identification signs included with the outcome letter.

Use of tobacco and nicotine products during adolescence can affect brain development. These products harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood, and impulse control. Young people can also become addicted to nicotine much quicker than adults. Even while just experimenting. Therefore, it is important that steps are taken to prevent tobacco use in young people. Our local tobacco retailers are vital in preventing youth access to nicotine products. If you have any questions about the compliance checks, reach out to [info@holmeshealth.org](mailto:info@holmeshealth.org).