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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 21, 2019

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND CITY HEALTH OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE "CANNABIS FACTS CHICAGO" CAMPAIGN TO PROVIDE PRECAUTIONARY GUIDANCE AHEAD OF CANNABIS LEGALIZATION IN 2020**

*Health and safety tips designed to ensure safe and responsible consumption, and provide information on the potential health impacts for youth*

CHICAGO – With the legalization of cannabis in the state of Illinois on January 1, 2020, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) are issuing guidance and precautionary information for those who plan to consume products recreationally. To ensure a safe and responsible implementation of legalized cannabis, the City is rolling out a new public service awareness campaign called *Cannabis Facts Chicago* aimed at offering residents, particularly parents and guardians, information on the potential impact of recreational cannabis as well as tips for adults on how to consume cannabis safely if they choose to do so.

While those over 21 years of age will be able to purchase cannabis products at licensed dispensaries, the City of Chicago is urging responsible consumption, warning that products can be much more potent than in the past and overuse can have serious health consequences, especially for youth and young adults.

"As we work to equitably stand up the recreational cannabis industry and right the wrongs of the War on Drugs, our first priority will always be the safety of our communities and residents," said Mayor Lightfoot. "That's why the City of Chicago's departments and sister agencies are partnering with local medical providers to create a new campaign to provide our residents and communities with clear guidance around cannabis use, particularly how to protect our youth from products that could be harmful to their growth and development."

As the City readies rules around possession and consumption, and looks to adopt policies that ensure social equity, it also wants to reduce potential harms and protect youth, who are more susceptible to the negative health consequences of overuse, as their brains and bodies are still developing. In addition to the fact that



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use of cannabis is illegal for those under 21, it is important for youth and all users to consider that products today are much more potent than in the past.

“We’ve learned from other states and cities where cannabis has been legalized, and one important lesson is around responsible consumption - take it slow and know what you’re consuming,” said Chicago Department of Public Health Acting Commissioner Allison Arwady, MD, MPH. “Overuse of cannabis, both short- and long-term, can have negative health consequences. And young people should not be using it at all.”

The City is encouraging residents considering consuming cannabis to review these health and safety tips:

**Protect your brain** – Your brain continues to develop until age 25, and studies have shown that cannabis use in young people can impair brain development. Cannabis use, particularly heavy use by young people, can impair short term memory, learning ability and even intelligence, and has been associated with increased risks for depression and suicidal thoughts in the future.

**Know your dose** – Cannabis now comes in many different forms and is much more potent than in the past, with levels of THC, the psychoactive component in cannabis, three times what they were about 25 years ago. Over-consumption can result in hallucinations, paranoia, increased heart rate, confusion, poor judgment, panic attacks, nausea and vomiting.

States and municipalities that have legalized cannabis have seen an increase in emergency room visits and hospitalizations with people experiencing such symptoms, especially after consuming edibles. Go slow and know your limits, and if someone is having a severe reaction, call 911.

**Avoid frequent use** – Daily cannabis use, particularly in high doses, can impair your memory and has been associated with an increased risk of psychosis. People with a family history of mental illness are advised to consult a physician before consuming cannabis. Cannabis use can, in some cases, also lead to addiction. The earlier in life you begin using cannabis, the more likely you are to become addicted.

**Pregnant and breastfeeding women should abstain** – There is no safe amount of cannabis while pregnant or breastfeeding, regardless of how you consume it. THC can be transferred to your baby through your placenta or your breast milk. Cannabis use during pregnancy is linked to low birth weight babies, which carries a number of health risks.



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**Don't drive while high** – Driving while under the influence of cannabis is not just dangerous to yourself and others, it's also illegal. Cannabis, like alcohol, causes impairment and should not be consumed prior to operating a vehicle or performing any task that has other inherent risks. States that have legalized cannabis have seen an increase in motor vehicle accidents related to cannabis use.

**Keep it safe** – Ensure that the only person using your cannabis is you. Unintentional cannabis ingestion can affect kids, pets, and visitors to your home. Edibles can come in the form of candy, chocolate or beverages that might be attractive to children. Keep your cannabis in a child-resistant container and consider storing in a lockbox or safe.

“The developing teenage brain is more at risk for the negative effects of cannabis use, and that’s where my biggest concern is,” said Maria Rahmandar, MD, medical director of the Substance Use and Prevention Program at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital. “Luckily most teens are making the healthy decision not to use cannabis, but those teens who are using it should know that they are at risk for developing mood disorders and even addiction, and parents should know that, too.”

CDPH will work with partners in the medical community, as well as Chicago Public Schools and City Colleges of Chicago, to communicate these tips to residents, and particularly young people, about the use of cannabis. For more information, please visit [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdph/provdrs/healthy\\_living/svcs/cannabis-facts-chicago.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdph/provdrs/healthy_living/svcs/cannabis-facts-chicago.html)

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