



Support Removing Flavored Cigars from the Market to Protect Kids

FDA has issued a proposed rule to remove flavored cigars from the market. In April 2022, FDA announced a proposed rule to prohibit all characterizing flavors in cigars. Its decision was based on clear evidence that flavors increase the appeal of cigars and make them easier to use, particularly for youth, and that removing flavored cigars from the market would reduce the number of youth cigar smokers.¹ Characterizing flavors are already prohibited in cigarettes except for menthol-flavored cigarettes, which FDA is also proposing to prohibit.

Cigar manufacturers have flooded the market with flavored cigars. Sales of all cigars more than doubled between 2000 and 2021, from 6.2 billion cigars to 14.6 billion,² largely driven by increased sales of smaller types of cigars, many of which are flavored. Cigars come in hundreds of kid-friendly flavors like “Berry Fusion,” “Cocoa,” and “Cherry Dynamite,” and can be as cheap as 3 for 99 cents.³ Nielsen convenience store data show that flavored cigars’ share of the overall cigar market increased to 53.3% in 2020.⁴

Flavored cigars are particularly appealing to youth. Flavors improve the taste and mask the harshness of tobacco, making flavored tobacco products more appealing and easier for beginners, who are often youth, to smoke.⁵ As documented in the proposed rule, flavors in cigars increase youth initiation, progression to regular use and are associated with greater potential for addiction.⁶ Many youth who smoke cigars report smoking flavored cigars. In 2023, 64.8% of youth cigar smokers smoked a flavored cigar in the past month,⁷ an increase from 2021 (44.4% of youth cigar smokers).⁸ Earlier data found that nearly three quarters of youth cigar smokers said they smoked cigars “because they come in flavors I like.”⁹ Not surprisingly, the top five most popular cigar brands among 12-17 year olds who have used cigars all come in flavor varieties.¹⁰ Teens and young adults are more likely than adults 25 years and older to report smoking flavored cigar brands.¹¹

Young people smoke cigars, especially Black and Hispanic youth. While cigar smoking is often perceived as an activity of older men, a troubling number of today’s cigar smokers are youth and young adults. The wide assortment of flavors, colorful packaging, and affordability of many cigars make them an appealing tobacco product for youth. In 2023, 420,000 youth were cigar smokers.¹² Black and Hispanic youth smoke cigars at higher rates than White youth.¹³

Cigar smoking harms health. Cigar smoke is composed of the same toxic and carcinogenic constituents found in cigarette smoke.¹⁴ Cigar smoking causes cancer of the oral cavity, larynx, esophagus and lung, and daily cigar smokers have an increased risk of heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and an aortic aneurysm.¹⁵ The level of risk is likely related to the level of exposure to the toxic constituents in the smoke, such as the frequency of use and whether or how much smoke is inhaled. But any cigar use increases health risks compared to those who do not use tobacco at all.¹⁶

Action to remove flavored cigars from the market is long overdue. In 2016 and again in 2018, FDA said it intended to prohibit flavored cigars but did not issue a proposed rule. Now that FDA has followed the science and issued a proposed rule, any effort to block or delay FDA’s rulemaking should be opposed. Every day that passes, more than 800 kids try cigar smoking for the first time.¹⁷ The evidence about the role flavors play in attracting youth to cigars is extensive, and FDA should quickly finalize and implement a rule to prohibit flavored cigars.

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- ¹ FDA, FDA Proposes Rules Prohibiting Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars to Prevention Youth Initiation, Significantly Reduce Tobacco-Related Disease and Death, April 28, 2022. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-proposes-rules-prohibiting-menthol-cigarettes-and-flavored-cigars-prevent-youth-initiation>
- ² U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), Tobacco Statistics.
- ³ Delnevo, DC, Giovenco, DP, and Miller, EJ, "Changes in the Mass-merchandise Cigar Market Since the Tobacco Control Act," *Tobacco Regulatory Science*, 3(2 Suppl 1): S8-S16, 2017.
- ⁴ Delnevo, CD, et al., "Cigar Sales in Convenience Stores in the US, 2009-2020," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 326(23): 2429-2432.
- ⁵ Kostygina, G, Glantz, S, & Ling, PM, "Tobacco industry use of flavours to recruit new users of little cigars and cigarillos," *Tobacco Control* 25(1):66-74, January 2016.
- ⁶ FDA, *Scientific Assessment of the Impact of Flavors in Cigar Products*, March 2022, <https://www.fda.gov/media/157593/download>.
- ⁷ Birdsey, J, et al., "Tobacco Product Use Among U.S. Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2023," Supplementary Table 2, *MMWR* 72(44):1173-1182, November 3, 2023.
- ⁸ Gentzke, AS, et al., "Tobacco Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students – National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021," *MMWR* 71(5), March 11, 2022
- ⁹ Ambrose, BK, et al., "Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, published online October 26, 2015.
- ¹⁰ SAMHSA's public online data analysis system (PDAS). National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2021.
- ¹¹ Delnevo, C, et al., "Preference for flavoured cigar brands among youth, young adults and adults in the USA," *Tobacco Control* 24(4):389-94, 2015.
- ¹² Birdsey, J, et al., "Tobacco Product Use Among U.S. Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2023," *MMWR* 72(44):1173-1182, November 3, 2023.
- ¹³ Birdsey, J, *MMWR* 72(44), November 3, 2023.
- ¹⁴ Pickworth, WB, et al., "Dual Use of Cigarettes, Little Cigars, Cigarillos, and Large Cigars: Smoking Topography and Toxicant Exposure," *Tobacco Regulatory Science* 3(Suppl 1):S72-S83, April 2017. Chen, J, et al., "Biomarkers of Exposure among U.S. Cigar Smokers: An Analysis of 1990-2012 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) Data," American Association for Cancer Research, 2014.
- ¹⁵ NCI, *Cigars: Health Effects and Trends*, 1998.
- ¹⁶ NCI, *Cigars: Health Effects and Trends*, 1998. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Premium Cigars: Patterns of Use, Marketing, and Health Effects*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.17226/26421>.
- ¹⁷ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), HHS, *Results from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH: Detailed Tables*, Table 4.9A, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-nsduh-detailed-tables>. Cigars are defined as cigars, cigarillos or little cigars.