

Support Restricting the Sale of Flavored Cigars to Protect Kids



Cigar manufacturers have flooded the market with flavored cigars. Sales of all cigars more than doubled between 2000 and 2023, from 6.2 billion cigars to 11.6 billion,¹ 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.² Nielsen convenience store data show that flavored cigars’ share of the overall cigar market increased to 53.3% in 2020.³

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.⁴ Flavors in cigars increase youth initiation, progression to regular use and are associated with greater potential for addiction.⁵ Many youth who smoke cigars report smoking flavored cigars. Nationally, in 2023, 64.8% of youth cigar smokers smoked a flavored cigar in the past month,⁶ an increase from 2021 (44.4% of youth cigar smokers).⁷ Earlier data found that nearly three quarters of youth cigar smokers said they smoked cigars “because they come in flavors I like.”⁸ Not surprisingly, the top five most popular cigar brands among 12-17 year olds who have used cigars all come in a variety of flavors.⁹ Teens and young adults are more likely than adults 25 years and older to report smoking flavored cigar brands.¹⁰

Young people smoke cigars, especially Black 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 2024, 330,000 youth nationwide were smoking cigars.¹¹ Cigar smoking among Black high schoolers is double that of White high schoolers.¹² The 2024 Surgeon General’s Report, *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities*, stated, “Tobacco industry documents suggest that product design and flavoring was a deliberate and iterative process to optimize the appeal of cigarillos and little cigars to youth, women, and African American people who smoke, especially those who smoke mentholated tobacco products.”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 restrict the sale of flavored cigars is supported by the evidence and is long overdue.

States and localities have the authority to regulate the sale of tobacco products to protect public health. Although FDA started the procedure to remove flavored cigars from the market, states and localities should not wait for FDA action. Every day that passes, more than 700 kids try cigar smoking for the first time.¹⁷ The 2024 Surgeon General’s Report noted, “the scientific evidence to justify prohibiting the marketing, sales, and distribution of menthol tobacco products and flavored cigars has been both substantial and sufficient for years”¹⁸ and concluded that “The evidence is sufficient to infer that policies that prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products reduce sales of tobacco products and can reduce tobacco use. Eliminating the sale of flavored tobacco products, including flavored cigars, should also reduce tobacco use among groups experiencing disparities in tobacco use, especially if the policies are comprehensive and equitably implemented.”¹⁹

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- ¹ U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), Tobacco Statistics.
- ² 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.
- ³ Delnevo, CD, et al., "Cigar Sales in Convenience Stores in the US, 2009-2020," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 326(23): 2429-2432.
- ⁴ 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.
- ⁵ FDA, *Scientific Assessment of the Impact of Flavors in Cigar Products*, March 2022, <https://www.fda.gov/media/157593/download>.
- ⁶ 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.
- ⁷ 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
- ⁸ 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.
- ⁹ SAMHSA's public online data analysis system (PDAS). National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2021.
- ¹⁰ 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.
- ¹¹ Jamal, A, et al., "Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2024," *MMWR* 73(41):917-924, October 17, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/pdfs/mm7341a2-H.pdf>.
- ¹² Jamal, A, et al., *MMWR* 73(41):917-924, October 17, 2024.
- ¹³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2024, at 253, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-sgr-tobacco-related-health-disparities-full-report.pdf>.
- 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 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH: Detailed Tables*, Table 4.10A, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2024-nsduh-detailed-tables>. Cigars are defined as cigars, cigarillos or little cigars.
- ¹⁸ HHS, *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2024, at 273.
- ¹⁹ HHS, *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2024, at 13.