

Candy cigarettes: Bringing the candy man home

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New research suggests that playing with candy cigarettes may favorably set the minds of some children towards becoming future cigarette smokers.

The study, reported in the July issue of *Preventive Medicine*, shows that in a nationally representative sample of 25,887 US adults, the percentages who had never consumed candy cigarettes were 12% in current and former smokers vs. 22% in never smokers, and the corresponding percentages of adults who had regularly (often or very often) consumed candy cigarettes were 22% in current and former smokers vs. 14% in never smokers.

Candy cigarettes are made of candy or gum, shaped into cylindrical sticks and sold in rectangular boxes roughly the size of cigarette packs. In the US they are typically displayed next to the bubble gum and the trading cards commonly sold in supermarkets and convenience stores. Make-believe cigarette smoking may be considered illicit and mature by some children, but research suggests that playing with these edible “toys” cannot be considered as a benign parody of cigarette smoking.

This new research is built on past research, such as focus groups in the US with 4 to 11 year-old children and a survey of 7th graders which indicated that playing with candy cigarettes may actually desensitize children to the harm of real smoking (Pediatrics 1992: 89: 27-31).

“Candy and gum look-alike products allow children to respond to

tobacco marketing and advertising long before they are old enough to smoke a cigarette,” comments Dr. Klein, the corresponding author. “The continued existence of these products helps promote smoking as a culturally or socially acceptable activity.”

While countries including the UK, Australia, and Canada currently restrict candy cigarette sales, US federal and all but one state legislative efforts at banning candy cigarettes have been unsuccessful (the one exception was later repealed). Ironically, it appears that the responsibility for restricting candy cigarette sales in the US has been left up to large national retailers such as the Wal-Mart chain, which has a company-wide policy banning the sale of cigarette look-alike products to minors in all 50 states. Candy cigarettes cannot be considered simply as candy.

Source: Elsevier

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