

Smokers drop pricey cigarettes for cheaper alternatives: CDC

August 2 2012, By Steven Reinberg, HealthDay Reporter



Roll-your-own tobacco.
Photo: U.S. Centers for
Disease Control and
Prevention

Other tobacco products allow industry to work around tax hikes, labeling regs, study authors say.

(HealthDay) -- With cigarette costs rising, more smokers are turning to cigars or "rolling their own" to cut costs, suggests a new U.S. government report that shows a substantial increase in the use of non-cigarette tobacco products.

Cigarette smoking continues to decline, according to the report released Thursday.

A modest 2.5 percent drop in cigarette use occurred between 2010 and

2011, but use of other [tobacco products](#) jumped 17 percent, according to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

"What we have seen is the steady progress in reducing the consumption of the most dangerous forms of [tobacco](#), which are inhaled combustible products, stalled because there had been a substitute of roll-your-own and cigarette-like cigars that have increased in recent years due to loopholes in the [tax structure](#)," said Terry Pechacek, associate director for science in the CDC's Office of Smoking and Health.

"Smokers overall and youth in particular are price-sensitive and respond to the availability of something that is cheaper that fills their desire for a smokable product," he added.

Pechacek noted that small cigars that look like [cigarettes](#) except for a dark paper label have been reformulated to bypass the tax law that covers cigarettes. "These are available for like \$1.40 a pack," he said. Nationwide, a pack of cigarettes averages \$5.98, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

These products are also not subject to U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#) regulations on flavoring and labeling products "light" or "low tar" as cigarettes are, but are just as "lethal and dangerous as cigarettes," Pechacek said.

The findings were published in the CDC's Aug. 3 [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#).

Since 2008, the dramatic increase in cigar smoking and the use of pipe tobacco for roll-your-own cigarettes has offset the decline in cigarette smoking, the agency says.

The availability of these low-priced, less-regulated products has blunted

the impact of cigarette tax increases and regulations that might have prevented kids from starting to smoke, reduced smoking overall and encouraged people to quit, the CDC says.

Highlights of the report include:

- A 33 percent drop in cigarette smoking from 2000 to 2011.
- A 123 percent increase in non-cigarette tobacco use from 2000 to 2011.
- A 482 percent increase in pipe tobacco consumption from 2000 to 2011.
- A 233 percent increase in large cigar smoking from 2000 to 2011.

Danny McGoldrick, vice president for research at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said that "the report shows the length tobacco companies will go to, to manipulate their products to avoid taxes and avoid regulation in order to keep smokers smoking and to attract new users."

For example, to avoid regulations and taxes, companies have called roll-your-own tobacco "pipe tobacco," but it's really the same cigarette tobacco relabeled, McGoldrick said.

To avoid the tax on small cigars, the tobacco companies are calling these cigarette-like cigars "large cigars," which aren't taxed at the same high rate, he said.

They do this by adding weight to the product and by adding a little tobacco to the paper wrap, which lets them define these products as large cigars, McGoldrick said.

"The solution is to equalize the tax on all tobacco products," he said. "Every time we take a step to reduce smoking, the companies will do something to get around it."

Dr. Norman Edelman, chief medical officer at the American Lung Association, said his group "takes pride in the reduction in cigarette consumption, as our efforts have played an important role in getting taxes on cigarettes raised, and in getting the FDA its present regulatory role with regard to tobacco products.

But with the findings from the new report, "it is clear that our work is not yet done; the tax code and FDA's effectiveness have to be strengthened and rationalized, and of course we must continue our efforts in our successful [smoking](#) cessation programs," Edelman said. "The public should bear in mind that, by far, tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., exceeding 400,000 deaths per year."

More information: To learn more about how to quit smoking, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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Citation: Smokers drop pricey cigarettes for cheaper alternatives: CDC (2012, August 2)
retrieved 3 May 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-smokers-pricey-cigarettes-cheaper-alternatives.html>

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