

Cigarette-like 'cigarillos' flout efforts to curb smoking

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Dunhill Early Morning Pipe Tobacco, 1990's Murray. Credit: Sjschen/Wikipedia

The introduction of cigarette-like mentholated 'cigarillos' (mini cigars which are leaf-wrapped) to the UK is helping big tobacco companies to bypass strict public health measures intended to reduce smoking, say researchers.

Writing in the BMJ's *Tobacco Control* in an article published Thursday 27 August 2020, the team from the University of Bath focus on the introduction and marketing of cigarillo products which mimic cigarette brands, are as dangerous to health, yet are not subject to the same public health measures or taxation.

Whereas the UK has some of the strictest [tobacco control](#) legislation in the world for cigarettes and Roll-Your-Own (RYO) [tobacco](#)—including restrictions on minimum pack sizes, standardised packaging, and most recently a ban on [menthol cigarettes](#)—cigarillos can be sold in small pack sizes, with striking colourful pack designs, and still remain mentholated.

The researchers identify that these products are clearly aimed at cigarette smokers. Earlier this year, in January 2020, one company Japan Tobacco International (JTI) launched 'Sterling Dual Capsule Leaf Wrapped', officially sold as cigarillos but closely resembling previous cigarette products from the same company and with the same brand. Other [tobacco companies](#), Imperial and STG, have since launched similar products suggesting they are also keen to exploit these loopholes.

In March 2020, packs of 10 of these cigarillos were being sold for £4.60, significantly less than half the price of a 20-stick packet of Sterling Dual Capsule cigarettes (purchased for £10.95 in a convenience store). The researchers behind the study say the low pack purchase price is enhancing its consumer appeal, especially for poorer smokers.

Dr. Rosemary Hiscock from the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, who has been involved in a number of studies evaluating recent tobacco legislation, explains: "Although cigarillos have to carry large pictorial health warnings, they can still be sold in colourful branded packaging, in 10-stick packs, can feature price markings which keep prices low, and can include characterising flavours, like menthol.

Cigarettes, by contrast, must be sold in standardised olive-coloured packets of at least 20 sticks featuring the brand name only in a standard font and without any price markings or flavours. Future legislation needs to extend existing rules for cigarettes to all other tobacco products and accessories."

Tobacco tax expert and lead author on the study, Dr. Rob Branston from the University of Bath's School of Management adds: "Currently the market for cigarillos in the UK is relatively small, but this could grow rapidly in view of industry efforts to market these products as a new cheaper alternative and this should worry us all given the health impact of a cigarillo is broadly the same as a cigarette. To address this the UK should consider a variety of measures, including urgent adjustments to the tax system so that cigarillos packs can't be sold so cheaply.

"As an immediate first step we would like to see the Treasury extend a minimum excise tax to cigarillos, in order to appreciably raise the pack purchase price. If they are going to be sold as being cigarettes, they should be taxed like it too."

The authors advocate that taxation offers the most immediate way forward; amending UK tobacco regulation is the ideal solution but will take significantly longer to change than taxation and would require public consultation. The recent announcement on the proposed abolition of Public Health England (PHE) likely further complicates any such pro

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