

Researchers document how surge of cheap, flavored cigars targets young consumers

October 5 2023, by Andrew Smith



Screenshot from the Backwoods website distinguishes products available in California compared to the rest of the country, due to California's law prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products. Image captured June 2, 2023. Credit: *Not Your Grandfather's Cigar* (2023).

As the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prepares to issue a final rule prohibiting flavored cigars, a report issued today by the Rutgers Institute for Nicotine and Tobacco Studies (INTS) and the Campaign for

Tobacco-Free Kids documents how tobacco companies have flooded the market with cheap, flavored cigars that appeal to children and have used a variety of marketing strategies to attract young people.

According to [a report](#) compiled by the two organizations, sales of all [cigars](#) more than doubled between 2000 and 2021, largely driven by increased sales of smaller cigars, many of which are flavored. The hundreds of flavored cigars make up about half the [cigar](#) market, with flavors ranging from fruit punch and grape to "Berry Fusion," "Iced Donut" and "Cherry Dynamite."

"Kids are the most price-sensitive consumers in any market, and these cigars are cheap," said Kymberle Sterling, associate director for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion at INTS and an associate professor at the Rutgers School of Public Health. "A pack of three cigars often sells for 99 cents. The sweet flavors also appeal to children."

The report notes that these flavored products have helped make cigars the second most popular tobacco product among [youth](#), after e-cigarettes. About 500,000 youth use cigars, and each day, more than 800 youth try cigar smoking for the first time. Black youth have the highest rates of cigar smoking, with Black high school students using cigars at 1.5 times the rate of White high schoolers.

The report comes as the FDA is about to issue a final rule prohibiting flavored cigars. The federal agency announced a proposed rule in April 2022 based on evidence that cigar use poses serious health risks, flavors increase the appeal of cigars and make them easier to use, especially for youth, and removing flavored cigars from the market would reduce the number of youth who smoke cigars. Flavors are already prohibited in cigarettes except for menthol-flavored cigarettes, which the FDA is proposing to prohibit.

These rules will benefit [public health](#), and the FDA should finalize and implement them without delay, according to the report's authors, who also call on states and cities to continue their increasing efforts to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products.

Rutgers contributors to the report include Sterling, INTS Director Cristine Delnevo and INTS Assistant Professor Ollie Ganz.

Other findings of the report include:

- Flavors have fueled the popularity of cigars among 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. Flavors in cigars increase youth initiation and progression to regular use and are associated with greater potential for addiction. The majority of youth who have smoked cigars started with a flavored cigar. Nearly three-quarters of youth who smoke cigars said they did so "because they come in flavors I like." The most popular cigar brands among youth come in an array of candy and fruit flavors. Of concern, flavors can create the impression that a product is less harmful than it really is.
- Cigar smoking harms health. Cigar smoke is composed of the same toxic and carcinogenic constituents found in [cigarette smoke](#). Cigar smoking causes cancer of the oral cavity, larynx, esophagus and lungs, and daily cigar smokers have an increased risk of heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and aortic aneurysm. The U.S. Surgeon General has warned that youth use of nicotine in any form is unsafe, can cause addiction and can harm adolescent brain development.
- Flavored cigars are marketed in ways that appeal to youth. Cigar makers use a variety of marketing strategies to attract [young people](#), including shiny, colorful packaging that boldly

communicates sweet [flavors](#), engaging in popular social media trends, sponsoring concerts and other events, recruiting celebrities for endorsements and keeping prices low. Cigars are promoted through in-store displays, in magazines, and with branded merchandise and rewards programs. Many of these strategies are used to promote cigars, specifically in Black communities.

More information: Report: [assets.tobaccofreekids.org/con ... 023_Cigar-Report.pdf](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: Researchers document how surge of cheap, flavored cigars targets young consumers (2023, October 5) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-10-document-surge-cheap-flavored-cigars.html>

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