



Cigars: Not a Safe Alternative to Cigarettes

Cigars are a public health risk and a leading cause of laryngeal, oral and esophageal cancers. Unfortunately, sales of cigars continue unabated. Cigar use among youth is on the rise - almost as common as cigarette smoking. And among some groups, such as black high school students, more students use cigars than cigarettes.¹ The most significant trend is the use of “little” cigars and cigarillos, which are often the same size as cigarettes but can be flavored in ways that are prohibited for cigarettes. While cigarette sales decreased 18 percent between 2000 and 2007, sales of little cigars more than doubled.²

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What Defines a Cigar?

A cigar is usually defined, for tax purposes, as any roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or in any substance containing tobacco. A cigarette is usually defined as any roll of tobacco wrapped in paper or any substance not containing tobacco. Unlike most machine-made cigarettes, cigars do not usually have a filter.

Cigars sold in the United States include large cigars, cigarillos, and little cigars. Some cigarillos and little cigars are similar in size and shape to cigarettes; some have filters. These little cigars are often sold in cigarette-like packs. Their size, shape, filters, flavors, and packaging make them look like cigarettes, except for their color. Because of the lower taxes, cigarillos and little cigars cost less than cigarettes in many states, making them more affordable for younger smokers. Cigars are also not currently subject to many of the same ingredient disclosure and sales, marketing, and flavoring restrictions as cigarettes. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently proposed to “deem” cigars as tobacco products under their authority and subject them to some of the same requirements as cigarettes and other types of tobacco products.

Cigar Use in the United States and Growing Use Among Youth

- Approximately 12.4 million people in the U.S. ages 12 and older smoke cigars.³
- Cigar smoking is more common among individuals who are male, younger in age, non-Hispanic, less educated, less wealthy and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered.⁴
- Prevalence of cigar use varies more than six-fold across states, from a high of 11.9 percent of adults in Mississippi to a low of 1.8 percent in Utah.⁵
- Prevalence of cigar smoking is particularly high among high school males and non-Hispanic black high school students. In fact, 15.4 percent of male high school students and 14.7 percent of black high school students smoke cigars.⁶ Nearly one in four (23 percent) male high school seniors smoke cigars.⁷ Cigar use has increased significantly in recent years among black high school students.⁸

Health Risks of Cigar Smoking

- Cigars are one of the many tobacco products on the market that appeal to youth. Some cigarette-sized cigars contain candy and fruit flavoring, such as strawberry and grape. More than two in five adult (43 percent) cigar smokers also smoke flavored cigars.
 - Cigars are not a safe alternative to cigarettes, as they contain many of the same cancer-causing substances as cigarettes and other tobacco products.
 - Regular cigar smoking increases the risk of cancers of the lung, mouth, larynx, esophagus and likely pancreas.⁹
 - Cigar smokers are four to 10 times more likely to die from laryngeal, oral or esophageal cancers than non-smokers.¹⁰
 - Heavy cigar smoking also increases the risk of developing coronary heart disease and lung diseases, such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis.¹¹
 - Even cigar smokers who don't inhale still breathe in large amounts of smoke from the lit end of the cigar.
 - All tobacco products, including cigars, contain nicotine, which may induce dependence and harm health. Many cigar smokers also use other tobacco products, including cigarettes, roll-your-own and smokeless tobacco.¹²
 - Cigars also produce secondhand smoke that is dangerous for non-smokers.
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Status of Cigars in Tobacco Control Laws

- Cigars are taxed differently than cigarettes, and often at lower rates.
 - Some states and localities exempt cigar stores, cigar bars and tobacco shops from smoke-free laws. These loopholes endanger public health.
 - Cigars manufacturers are not required to disclose to the federal government any information about ingredients that are harmful or potentially harmful. However, cigarettes are subject to these disclosure requirements.
 - Many cigar manufacturers regularly manipulate their products to evade taxation and other tobacco control regulations.
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ACS CAN on Cigars

Regulation of cigars is part of ACS CAN's comprehensive approach to reducing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke in the United States. ACS CAN makes the following policy recommendations with respect to cigars:

Subject cigars to taxation: Like all other tobacco products, cigars should be subject to taxation as well as manufacturing and marketing rules to reduce the deadly and costly burden of tobacco use. All cigars, regardless of size, must be taxed at rates equivalent to cigarettes.

Include cigars in smoke-free laws: Secondhand smoke from cigars poses significant health risks to smokers and those around them, and should be included as part of any smoke-free law. This includes prohibiting cigar use in cigar and tobacco shops, bars identified as "cigar bars", gaming facilities and wherever else cigarette smoking is prohibited.

Regulate cigars as tobacco products: All types of cigars, regardless of their weight, should be regulated by the FDA as tobacco products and subject to the same sales, marketing and disclosure requirements as cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and other tobacco products.

References

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