

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. While cigarette consumption decreased by nearly 40 percent from 2000 to 2015, cigar consumption increased by 92 percent.ⁱ Cigar use among youth almost as common as cigarette smoking. And among some groups, such as black high school students, more students use cigars than cigarettes.ⁱⁱ 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.

Among youth, cigar use is almost as common as cigarette smoking.

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. Large cigars usually contain at least a half an ounce of tobacco and can take 1-2 hours to smoke. Cigarillos tend to be shorter and contain 3 grams or less of tobacco. 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. In fact, in 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sent warning letters to four tobacco manufacturers stating that they were illegally selling flavored cigarettes labeled as “little cigars.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Cigar Use in the United States

- Approximately 12.5 million people in the U.S. ages 12 and older smoked cigars in 2013.^{iv}
- Among adults, cigar smoking is more common among individuals who are male, younger in age, non-Hispanic multi-race or non-Hispanic Black, and report serious psychological distress.^v
- In 2016, 7.7 percent or 1.13 million high school students smoked cigars. This rate is similar to the cigarette rate of 8.0 percent.^{vi}
- In fact, cigar smoking was more common among non-Hispanic Black high school students (9.5 percent) than cigarette smoking (3.0 percent).^{vii}
- 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. About two-thirds (63.5 percent) of youth cigar smokers report smoking flavored cigars.^{viii}

Health Risks of Cigar Smoking

- 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, oral cavity, larynx, and esophagus.^{ix}
- Cigar smokers are four to 10 times more likely to die from laryngeal, oral or esophageal cancers than non-smokers.^x
- Heavy cigar smoking also increases the risk of developing coronary heart disease and lung diseases, such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis.^{xi}
- 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.^{xii}
- Cigars also produce secondhand smoke that is dangerous for non-smokers.

Status of Cigars in Tobacco Control Laws

- Cigars are taxed differently than cigarettes, and often at lower rates. Because of the lower taxes, cigarillos and little cigars cost less than cigarettes in many states, making them more affordable for younger smokers. Cigars, cigarillos and little cigars may be sold as individual sticks, which can again, make them more appealing to youth.
- 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.

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.

ⁱ American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2017*. Atlanta, GA: American Cancer Society, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Arrazola RA, Neff LJ, Kennedy SM, et al. Tobacco Use Among Middle and High School Students – United States, 2013. *MMWR* 2014; 63(45): 1021-1041.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.fda.gov/newsevents/newsroom/pressannouncements/ucm532563.htm>

^{iv} Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). *Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings*. September 2016. Available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabs-2015/NSDUH-DetTabs-2015/NSDUH-DetTabs-2015.pdf>.

^v Phillips E, Wang TW, Husten CG, et al. Tobacco Product Use Among Adults — United States, 2015. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2017;66:1209–1215. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6644a2>.

^{vi} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tobacco Use Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2011–2016. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 2017;66(23):597-603

^{vii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tobacco Use Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2011–2016. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 2017;66(23):597-603

^{viii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2014. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2015;64(38):1066–70

^{ix} American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2017*. Atlanta, GA: American Cancer Society, 2017

^x American Cancer Society, 2014.

^{xi} CDC. Cigar Fact Sheet. Updated November 14, 2013. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/tobacco_industry/cigars/#marketing. Accessed July 11, 2014.

^{xiii} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Smoking – 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014.