

Anything But Sweet - Tobacco Targets Youth with Candy Flavors

Statement from Legacy on New Research Showing Tobacco Products Contain Actual Candy Flavorings

WASHINGTON, May 7, 2014 -- In 2009, the landmark Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act banned flavorings in cigarettes, with the exception of menthol, because of their appeal to youth. We are now watching how the tobacco industry has adapted by offering other flavored tobacco products like cigars, little cigars and cigarillos, which are not included in the ban. New research released today in the New England Journal of Medicine reveals that these types of tobacco products are not only being marketed under flavor names that appeal to youth, but they also contain the same chemicals that provide fruit flavors in popular candy and drinks like Kool-Aid, Jolly Ranchers and Life Savers. For our nation's youth, this reality is anything but sweet.

Now that FDA has recently issued proposed rules that would bring cigars under its jurisdiction, it is time for FDA to act to remove flavors from all tobacco products, especially cigars. Today's research simply reinforces that position. The recent Surgeon General's report on the health consequences of smoking reported that 5.6 million kids alive today will die prematurely of tobacco-related disease and nearly 500,000 Americans will die each year. While cigarette use is on the decline among teens, other tobacco products have stepped in at cheaper prices and appealing flavors, like grape, peach, cherry and apple. The packaging and imagery of flavored products serve as powerful new sources of promotion to youth, even though the tobacco industry denies that flavored tobacco products are aimed toward young consumers. Flavors that were once confined to gum or candy products are now appearing in a wide range of tobacco products like snuff, cigars, little cigars, cigarillos, Bidis, loosies, flavored Hookah and e-cigarettes. Today's research shows that the industry is marketing products that are actually made like candy, and there is little question as to the target market.

A recent CDC report found that flavored smoking products are used by 42 percent of middle and high school students who smoke. Those percentages are extremely disturbing, leaving a bad taste in the mouth of public health leaders who are trying to create a new tobacco-free generation. Additionally, alternate combusted products are not classified as cigarettes under tax regulations, making them cheaper and more accessible to youth. The "unsweet" truth is that they are just harmful as cigarettes, causing tobacco-related disease, are smoked and inhaled as if they were cigarettes, and they're just as addictive.

We hope this research and the fact that young people are using these products at high rates will signal the public policy and tax regulators to close the loopholes that allow the industry to sell these alternative tobacco products. Deeming regulations, which would give FDA authority to regulate these products, are long overdue. The FDA should move quickly to act on it so that young people and smokers alike can see the sweet end to candy flavored tobacco.

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