

Banning Flavored Cigars is a Priority for Public Health

Policy Brief, Winter 2022

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Intended Audience

- Local Columbus policy makers

Objective

- Include flavored cigars in the flavored tobacco ban proposed for Columbus

Main Messages

- Combustible tobacco is the most harmful form of tobacco, and policy and regulation of products should be commensurate with harm
- Cigars come in a multitude of flavors and are commonly used to smoke cannabis among young people, so should be restricted

What are Tobacco Flavor Bans? Do They Work?



Flavor has been shown to increase the appeal of tobacco products, making it easier to start and continue using tobacco and making it more difficult to quit. When the United States (US) Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began regulating tobacco products in 2009, flavored cigarettes (except menthol) became illegal to sell in the US. Currently, the FDA has proposed a rule to ban flavors in cigar products and menthol in cigarettes; however, the regulatory process takes a long time, and meanwhile young people are seeking out appealing flavored products and menthol smokers are finding it hard to quit.

Flavor bans intend to prevent people from starting to use tobacco and help them quit. Bans have been passed in various local municipalities

across the US. While many of these bans have unfortunately excluded menthol cigarettes, they have all included flavored cigars. Studies of flavor bans show decreased availability and consumption of the banned products in the short-term.¹

In Columbus, council members are considering a proposed ban on flavored vaping products and menthol cigarettes. Decades of evidence support banning menthol in cigarettes, especially because they pose the largest threat to public health. Vaping products have been shown to appeal to youth

because of their availability in flavors, but they may also appeal to adult smokers attempting to quit cigarettes. Including them in the Columbus flavor ban may prevent youth initiation, but could raise barriers for adults attempting to quit smoking. Cigar products are not currently included in the proposed, citywide flavor ban. Restrictions should be greatest for the most harmful products, or are at least equal across tobacco products.



Evidence suggests that policies only targeting vaping products may have the countervailing effect of pushing people toward more harmful product alternatives.²

Cigar smoking, which poses similar risks to cigarette smoking has increased by 20% among young adults from 2012 to 2020. Disproportionately more racial/ethnic minorities and low income populations use cigars.³ Like vaping products and menthol cigarettes, cigars come in a multitude of appealing flavors. Cigar smoking may have become popular because cigarillo wraps, most of which are flavored, are commonly packed with cannabis. Inclusion of cigars in a flavor ban may not only reduce tobacco use, but may also impact cannabis use.

New Research on the Role of Flavor in Co-Use of Cigars and Cannabis



Using survey data and one-on-one interviews with young adult cigarillo smokers in the US, new research shows the impact of cigarillo flavor bans on co-use with cannabis. Flavor was the most appealing product characteristic among young adult cigarillo smokers. Flavored cigarillo products were ubiquitous in these young adults' environments, easily picked up at the corner store or gas station. Advertising and promotion of new flavors encouraged these young adults to try new products.

Two-thirds of the young adult cigarillo smokers in the study used cannabis in the past month, and 80% usually used a flavored cigarillo.⁴ Flavors were desirable for smoking with cannabis in blunts (using the cigarillo wrapper to pack cannabis). Those living in an area where flavored cigarillos were already banned were less likely to use cannabis. This could be due to reduced appeal of unflavored cigarillos or the overall reduction in cigarillos available on the market given the high proportion that are typically available in flavors.

What Can the City of Columbus Do About This?

When drafting legislation to ban flavored tobacco products in Columbus, City Council should:

- Include flavored cigar products in addition to flavored vaping products and menthol cigarettes.
- Include flavor components or parts, such as blunt wraps, drops, capsules, filter tips, and flavor cards, which may be released as a manufacturer response.

Conclusion

Banning flavored cigar products in Columbus will reduce tobacco use equitably, given the disproportionate use of cigars among vulnerable populations. This will bring us one step closer to eliminating health inequities for residents of our capital city.

Growing evidence suggests that combined use of tobacco and cannabis will make up an increasing proportion of tobacco users moving forward. Thus, banning flavored cigar products may also curb co-use with cannabis.

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