THE RISE OF CIGARS AND CIGAR-SMOKING HARMS

Despite increases in cigar smoking, especially among youth, cigars are often overlooked by legislators and other policymakers who mistakenly believe that cigars are "not that harmful" compared to cigarettes and deserve special treatment. But cigars are addictive and deadly – causing lung cancer, other cancers, heart attacks and more – and they are often marketed in a wide variety of kid-friendly flavors.

Health Harms from Cigar Use

Like cigarettes, cigars are smoked and contain the same toxic and carcinogenic compounds.[1] Accordingly, cigar smoking causes the same kinds of serious health consequences as cigarette smoking, such as cancer of the lung, oral cavity, larynx, and esophagus.[2] More specifically:

- Cigar smokers experience higher rates of lung cancer, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) than non-smokers.
- Cigar smokers can spend up to an hour smoking a single cigar that can contain as much tobacco as a pack of cigarettes.
- Oral and esophageal cancer risks are similar among cigar smokers and cigarette smokers.
- Male cigar smokers are up to eight times more likely to die from oral cancer and ten times more likely to die from laryngeal cancers than nonsmokers.
- Cigar smoke is toxic and harms innocent non-users through secondhand smoke exposure.
- In the past, most cigar smokers did not inhale, so their risk for lung cancer from cigar smoking has been somewhat lower than cigarette smokers. But risk of lung cancer and other smoking-caused disease increases with more frequent cigar smoking and deeper inhalation; and increasing numbers of new cigar smokers are choosing small cigars that are smoked like cigarettes.[3]

Incorrect or insufficient knowledge about the health risks from smoking cigars and little cigars can lead to greater use of these products. For instance, researchers interviewed African American college students about little cigars and found that some students smoked little cigars because they believed they were less addictive and less harmful than cigarettes.[4]

The Rapid Rise of Small Cigars

Since 1998, small cigars have been the fastest growing segment of the expanding cigar market. Between 1998 and 2006, consumption of large cigars increased by 45 percent, but small cigar consumption increased by 154 percent.[5] This surge is especially dangerous because small cigars are more likely to be inhaled and smoked liked cigarettes, making their use even more harmful and deadly. In fact, many "little cigars" (such as Swisher Sweets "Small Cigars") have the same size and shape as cigarettes, and, like cigarettes, are sold in packs of twenty, often with filter tips. But these "little cigar" cigarettes exploit loopholes in existing legal definitions of cigarettes to escape being regulated or taxed as cigarettes, making them much more available and affordable, especially to youth.

- The much lower federal and state tax rates on small cigars compared to cigarettes encourage cigarette smokers to switch to virtually identical small cigars, rather than quit or cutback, when faced with high cigarette prices or a new cigarette tax increase. Market research has found that "a pack of 20 cigarillos can generally be found for a much lower price than even economy cigarettes," which encourages product switching.[6] As an industry analyst has observed, "People are using them as a cheaper alternative to cigarettes."[7]
- Internal industry documents show that this strategy to take advantage of tax disparities has been well-understood by the tobacco companies for years. Noting the "considerably lower taxation for cigars/cigarillos than for manufactured cigarettes," one Philip Morris document stated that a cigarillo-type product should be developed that is "acceptable taste-wise for usual cigarette smokers."[8]

- Cigar companies are also capitalizing on the similarities between little cigars and cigarettes by packaging and marketing little cigars in ways that mimic those of cigarettes. A 2007 advertisement for 20-packs of Winchester little cigars reads, "Always Smooth. Always satisfying. And always a fair price," enticing people to smoke little cigars instead of cigarettes. Surveys suggest that this marketing strategy is working – when smokers were asked what type of *cigarette* brand they usually smoke, some participants actually named *small cigar* brands like Phillies, Swisher Sweets, and Captain Black.[9]

Cigars and Kids

Although cigarette smoking has been slowly declining in the United States, cigar consumption has increased dramatically since 1993.[10] Between 2000 and 2006, for example, cigarette consumption declined by 13 percent but cigar consumption increased by more than 37 percent.[11] As one cigar retailer puts it, "The little stogies appeal to young adults and women who see them as less harmful and more stylish than cigarettes."[12]

- After cigarette smoking, cigar smoking is the second most common form of tobacco use among youth. The most recent data available show that in 2007, 13.6 percent of high school students reported current use of cigars (19.4 percent among boys; 7.6 percent among girls).[13]
- According to the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, more than 3,500 kids under 18 years old try cigars *each day* – only slightly lower than the number of under-18 kids who try smoking cigarettes each day (roughly 3,800).[14]
- In some states, cigar smoking among some youth groups is even more frequent than cigarette smoking. In New Hampshire, for example, 20.6 percent of high school boys currently smoke cigarettes but 27.2 percent smoke cigars.[15]
- In 2005, 3.5 percent of adolescents aged 12-17 years old (7.6 percent of 16-17 year olds, 2.7 percent of 14-15 year olds, and 0.3 percent of 12-13 year olds) smoked "blunts," the common name for cigars with the inner tobacco replaced with marijuana.[16] There are many "how-tos" and instructional videos available on the internet to show anyone how to make blunts.

Perceptions of Cigars and Cigar-Smoking. Magazines such as *Cigar Aficionado* link the smoking of cigars to a sophisticated life. Indeed, focus groups of African American college students describe using Black & Milds little cigars not only for the taste and "buzz," but also in social situations and for status.

Flavored Cigars. Much of the growing popularity of small cigars and cigarette-like "little cigars" comes from the explosive growth in flavorings, such as candy, fruit, chocolate, and various other kid-attracting tastes. While data on the impact of flavored cigars on youth initiation still needs to be collected and analyzed, completed research on flavored cigarettes shows that they are being tried and used primarily by the young.[17] As a cigar retailer commented, "The flavors attract customers."[18]

Thanks to legal actions against the cigarette companies based on the state tobacco lawsuit settlement agreements, the amount of flavored cigarettes on the market has been reduced significantly. But cigars are exempt from the tobacco settlement restrictions, and state governments (except for Maine) have not yet taken effective measures to stop the marketing of cigars with egregious kid-friendly flavors. It is likely that the small and flavored cigar problem will get even worse, since Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds, which already have a long history of marketing to kids, have recently acquired cigar companies.[19] Altria/Philip Morris has purchased John Middleton, Inc. (maker of the popular and cheap Black and Mild flavored cigars) and it is highly likely that R.J. Reynolds will acquire Swisher International cigar company (whose cigars include grape-flavored "blunts" and strawberry cigarillos).[20]

Cigar Prices. The federal cigar tax rate and the cigar tax rates in most states are significantly lower than cigarette tax rates. As a result, although there are some very high-end cigar brands that sell for $30 or more each, there are still single sticks and cigar packs that sell for $1.00 or less. As with cigarettes, the lower the price, the more appealing the product to youth, who generally have less disposable income than adults. A recent study found exactly that: raising the tax on cigars can reduce the cigar use prevalence among youth.[21]

[1] National Cancer Institute (NCI)*, Cigars: Health Effects and Trends,* Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 9, 1998, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/9/index.html.

[2] Baker, F, et al., "Health Risks Associated with Cigar Smoking," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 284(6):735-740, 2000.

[3] NCI*, Cigars: Health Effects and Trends,* Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 9, 1998, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/9/index.html.

[4] Jolly, DH, "Exploring the use of little cigars by students at a historically black university," *Preventing Chronic Disease* 5(3):1-9, July 2008, http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2008/jul/07_0157.htm.

[5] U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service, *Tobacco Briefing Room*, Tables 3 and 5, April 2007.

[6] *Euromonitor*, "Cigars in the US," January 8, 2007.

[7] Koch, W, "Small Cigars Making Big Gains," *USA Today*, February 20, 2008.

[8] Philip Morris, *Cigarillo Development*, Philip Morris Presentation, January 15, 1998, Bates No. 2064718859-8862.

[9] Delnevo, C, "Smokers' Choice: What Explains the Steady Growth of Cigar Use in the US?" *Public Health Reports* 121(2):116-119, 2006.

[10] NCI*, Cigars: Health Effects and Trends,* Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 9, 1998, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/9/index.html. USDA Economic Research Service, Tobacco Data Tables.

[11] USDA Economic Research Service, *Tobacco Briefing Room*, Tables 1 and 3, April 2007.

[12] Koch, W, "Small Cigars Making Big Gains," *USA Today*, February 20, 2008.

[13] U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2007," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 55(SS-4), June 6, 2008, http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/yrbss07_mmwr.pdf. Whites (14.8%) and Hispanic high schoolers (12.7%) smoke cigars more than African Americans (10.0%).

[14] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings,* Office of Applied Studies, NSDUH Series H-36, DHHS Publication No. SMA 09-4434, Rockville, MD, 2009, http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k8nsduh/2k8Results.cfm.

[15] CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2007," *MMWR* 57(SS-4), June 6, 2008, http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/yrbss07_mmwr.pdf. See also, Delnevo, C, et al., "Trading Tobacco: Are Youths Choosing Cigars Over Cigarettes?" *American Journal of Public Health* 95(12), 2005.

[16] SAMHSA, "Use of Marijuana and Blunts among Adolescents: 2005," *The NSDUH Report*, March 9, 2007, http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k7/mjBlunts/mjBlunts.htm.

[17] Carpenter, CM, et al, "New Cigarette Brands with Flavors that Appeal to Youth: Tobacco Marketing Strategies," *Health Affairs* 24(6):1601-1610, Nov/Dec 2005. Lewis, M. et al., "Dealing with an Innovative Industry: A Look at Flavored Cigarettes Promoted by Mainstream Brands," *American Journal of Public Health* 96(2), February 2006.

[18] Koch, W, "Small Cigars Making Big Gains," *USA Today*, February 20, 2008.

[19] See Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' factsheet, *Philip Morris and Targeting Kids*, http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0011.pdf, and *Is Reynolds American Tobacco Company A Good Corporate Citizen? Recent History Says No*, http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0124.pdf.

[20] Philip Morris USA, "Altria Group, Inc. Completes Acquisition of John Middleton, Inc.," Press Release, December 11, 2007. Herzog, B, "A Reynolds-Swisher Combination Makes Perfect Sense to Us - Our Proprietary Trade Survey Results Re-affirm This Belief," Citigroup Global Markets, December 16, 2007.

[21] Ringel, JS, Wasserman, J, & Andreyeva, T, "Effects of Public Policy on Adolescents' Cigar Use: Evidence From the National Youth Tobacco Survey," *American Journal of Public Health* 95(6):995-998, June 2005.