

Background

Dec. 10, 2008

"When it comes to hooking kids, cigarillos are the new cigarettes."
- Physicians for a Smoke Free Canada

New Democrat health critic Adrian Dix will introduce a Private Members' Bill in the next legislative session to make cigarillos less attractive for youth by banning flavouring agents and prohibiting them from being sold in packages of less than 20. He also wants to ensure that cigarillo packages are required to contain the same health information, health warnings and toxic constituent information as cigarette packages.

Organizations including Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, the Canadian Cancer Society, and the B.C. Clean Air Coalition have called for stricter regulation of cigarillos.

What are cigarillos?

Cigarillos are "little cigars" that are about the same size as a cigarette. They come in kid-friendly flavours like chocolate mint, raspberry and cherry and are sold at kid-friendly prices. Unlike cigarettes, cigarillos are packaged in brightly coloured tubes that resemble markers or lip-gloss and singles cost less than \$2 each.

Who is smoking them?

Cigarillos are a youth phenomena. According to Health Canada's 2007 Annual Smoking Survey, teenagers are smoking cigarillos at a significantly higher rate than adults. In 2007, 12 per cent of 15-19 year-olds had used a cigarillo in the past 30 days compared to three per cent of Canadians over age 25.

The 2006-07 Youth Smoking Survey conducted by the University of Waterloo among students in grades 5-12 found that 25.5 per cent of students in BC had tried cigarillos and 15.9 per cent had used them in the last 30 days.

Health Canada reports a huge growth in the sale of cigarillos between 2001 and 2006. Approximately 80 million were sold in 2006, compared to 50,000 in 2001.

Cigarillo use has not been traditionally included when measuring smoking prevalence, so agencies have been underestimating the youth smoking rate.

Do cigarillos pose the same health risks as cigarettes?

According to Health Canada, "little cigars" or cigarillos deliver higher levels of toxicants than cigarettes.

What makes them different than cigarettes?

Cigarettes cannot be sold in packages with fewer than 20 cigarettes. Cigarillos can be sold in singles and small packages, usually of four to eight.

Cigarettes must have a health warning that covers no less than 50 per cent of the package surface, toxic constituent information (tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide, etc.) and a health information message designed to help people quit. Cigarillos in boxes must have a health warning that covers 13 per cent to 27 per cent of the package but singles do not require any health warning at all. Cigarillo packages do not have to include toxic information or health information messages.

There are no bans on flavouring of cigarettes or cigarillos. Cigarettes are usually only flavoured with menthol while cigarillos are flavoured with fruit and candy flavours.

Ontario legislation

A Private Member's Bill to prohibit the flavouring of cigarillos and require a minimum package amount of 20 passed Third Reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 4, 2008. Bill 124, Smoke-Free Ontario Act (Cigarillos), 2008, was co-sponsored by both a New Democrat MPP and Liberal MPP and passed Third Reading with the support of members from all parties represented in the legislature.

Similar bills by members have been introduced in Nova Scotia and in the federal Parliament.

For more information:

Canadian Cancer Society
www.cancer.ca

Physicians for a Smoke Free Canada
www.smoke-free.ca
www.flavourgone.ca