Cigars comprise 3 major products:
- cigars
- little cigars
- cigarillos

**HIGH SCHOOL**

**Cigar v. cigarette use**
Current, or past 30-day, cigar use was 7.6% among all high school students in 2019. Current cigarette use was 5.8%.

- **Cigar use**: 7.6%
- **Cigarette use**: 5.8%

**“because they come in flavors I like”**

Since 2000, consumption rates of **cigars** among Americans have increased...

- **85.2%**

...while total **cigarette** consumption rates have declined...

- **38.7%**

**FLAVORED CIGAR USE**

- **43.2%** in **HIGH SCHOOL**
- **36.1%** in **MIDDLE SCHOOL**

In 2019, among current cigar smokers, **43.2%** of **high school** students and **36.1%** of **middle school** students used a flavored cigar in the past 30 days.

**140,000 years of potential life lost**
A 2012 study found that cigar smoking was responsible for approximately 9,000 premature deaths among adults aged 35 and older in the U.S. These deaths represented almost 140,000 years of potential life lost and monetary loss of **$22.9 billion**.

**1,350**
An estimated **1,350 youth** between the ages of 12 and 17 in the U.S. smoked their first cigar each day in 2018.

73.8% of past 30-day cigar users ages 12-17 said the leading reason for their cigar use was “because they come in flavors I like”
BACKGROUND

Cigars are defined in the United States tax code as “any roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or in any substance containing tobacco” that does not meet the definition of a cigarette.1

At least three major cigar products — little cigars, large cigars and cigarillos — exist in the category.2

- Little Cigars (small cigars) resemble cigarettes and generally have a filter like a cigarette.3 While cigarettes are wrapped in white paper, little cigars are wrapped in brown paper that contains some tobacco leaf. They are the smallest of the cigars.

- Traditional (large) cigars are larger than little cigars — they weigh more than 3 lbs./1000, the limit for little cigars — and are also referred to as “stogies.”2

- Cigarillos also weigh more than 3 lbs./1000 and are classified as “large” cigars by federal tax code.2 Cigarillos are longer, slimmer versions of large cigars. Cigarillos do not usually have a filter, but sometimes have wood or plastic tips.2

Little cigars, cigarillos and large cigars are sold in a variety of flavors, including candy and fruit flavors, such as sour apple, cherry, grape, chocolate and menthol.4,5

PATTERNS OF USE

Since 2000, total cigarette consumption rates among Americans have declined 38.7%, while consumption rates of cigars have increased dramatically (85.2%).6 Overall, 4.5% reported smoking cigars within the last 30 days in 2018.7 The rates of use among youth are particularly troubling. While the prevalence of cigar use among high school students in the U.S. has historically been lower than cigarette use, since 2016, cigar use has been very close to or even surpassed cigarette use.8

While the prevalence of cigar use among high school students in the U.S. has historically been lower than cigarette use, since 2016, cigar use has been very close to or even surpassed cigarette use, according to the National Youth Tobacco Survey [NYTS]. As a result of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act in 2009, the Food and Drug Administration banned flavored cigarettes, except menthol. Because FDA did not at that time have jurisdiction over cigars, cigar manufacturers took advantage of this loophole and began to heavily market and promote flavored cigar products, no doubt leading to the observed increase in use among youth. Additionally, a study found that after the cigarette flavor ban took effect, many youth simply switched to flavored cigars and menthol cigarettes.8
YOUTH

Current, or past 30-day, cigar use was 7.6% among all high school students and 2.3% among all middle school students in 2019, according to the National Youth Tobacco Survey. By comparison, current cigarette use was 5.8% among high school students.

An estimated 1,350 youth between the ages of 12 and 17 in the U.S. smoked their first cigar each day in 2018.

Among middle and high schoolers who have never smoked cigars, 28% were curious about smoking cigars and 35.9% reported susceptibility to cigars.

Among youth ages 12-17 who reported past month use of cigars in 2018, 8.5% reported daily or almost daily use of these products. In 2019, among high school current cigar users, 17.3% used the product on 20 or more days in the past 30 days.

Cigars are often hollowed out and used to smoke marijuana. The marijuana-filled cigar wrapper is called a “blunt.” More than half of youth past 30-day cigar users reported using blunts. In the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), the estimated prevalence of current blunt use among current youth cigar users was 58.2%.

Some subgroups of youth smoke cigars at higher rates.

Among youth overall, cigar use is highest in males.

Middle and high school students belonging to certain racial and ethnic groups smoke cigars at higher rates. Current cigar use rates are higher among Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific Islanders (11.1%), American Indians/Alaskan natives (6.8%) and Blacks (6.7%), compared to multiracial (6%), Hispanic (5.3%), White (5.2%) and Asian (1.1%) students.

Flavored cigars are popular among youth. Cigars are available in many flavors that appeal to youth, including fruit, dessert, and alcoholic beverages.

In 2019, among current cigar smokers, 43.2% of high school students and 36.1% of middle school students used a flavored cigar in the past 30 days.

Youth are smoking flavored little cigars [4.5%] at rates higher than cigarettes [3.7%], regular little cigars [3%], or large cigars [2.8%]. Among 12th grade students, 7.7% reported smoking flavored little cigars in the past 30 days.

Youth are more likely to use a flavored cigar the first time they try a cigar. Almost half (45.2%) of youth started with a flavored variety, compared with adults ages 25 years and older [33%].

Nearly three-quarters — 73.8% — of past 30-day cigar users ages 12-17 said the leading reason for their cigar use was “because they come in flavors I like” followed by 58.2% who stated it was “because they are affordable.”

First-time cigar use: Youth more likely to use flavored cigar

Youth are more likely to use a flavored cigar the first time they try a cigar.

Past 30-day cigar users ages 12-17: Leading reason for cigar use

“because they come in flavors I like” 73.8%
“because they are affordable” 58.2%
YOUNG ADULTS & ADULTS

Data from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows that while cigarette use among U.S. adults has steadily declined since 2003, adult cigar use has remained almost flat.

- **Adult cigar use is higher among younger adults.** In the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, young adults ages 18-25 had the highest prevalence of past month cigar use (8.6%) compared to youth ages 12-17 (1.7%) and adults ages 26 or older (4.1%).

- An estimated 3,414 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 initiate cigar smoking each day, compared to 1,465 adults aged 26 or older.

- Among adults who reported past month use of cigars in 2018, 20.1% reported daily or almost daily use of these products.

- **More adult males** report using cigar products “every day” or “some days” (6.8%) compared to adult females (1.1%).

- **More African American adults** reported using cigar products every day or some days (4.9%), compared to whites (4.1%) and Hispanics (2.8%).

- A national study of young adults ages 18-24 found that marijuana use was strongly correlated with past 30-day little cigar and cigarillo use. In 2014, the prevalence of past 30-day blunt use among past 30-day cigar users was 49% for young adults ages 18-25 and 19.3% for adults ages 26 or older.

HEALTH EFFECTS

Cigars cost lives and pose significant economic costs.

- A 2012 study found that cigar smoking was responsible for approximately 9,000 premature deaths among adults aged 35 and older in the U.S. These deaths represented almost 140,000 years of potential life lost and monetary loss of $22.9 billion. A recent study found that the removal of flavored cigars from the market would result in an estimated 800 fewer cigar smoking-attributable deaths in the U.S. each year and 112,000 fewer cigar smokers in each cohort of 18 year olds.

- Cigar smoking is associated with a higher risk of oral, esophageal, laryngeal and lung cancer. Cigar smokers have a marked increase in risk for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and experience higher mortality from COPD than do non-smokers.

- Though cigar smoke is generally similar to cigarette smoke, it contains higher levels of harmful constituents including tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNAs), NNK, carbon monoxide (CO), ammonia, and tar.

- Secondhand cigar smoke contains dangerous compounds and chemicals that pose significant health problems to cigar smokers and non-smokers. Cigar smoke contains higher concentrations of toxic and carcinogenic compounds than cigarette smoke.

A national study of young adults ages 18-24 found that marijuana use was strongly correlated with past 30-day little cigar and cigarillo use.
Most cigar smokers do inhale some amount of smoke and are unaware that they are doing it, even among those who do not intend to inhale. Regardless of how much inhalation actually takes place, studies show that because cigar smoke dissolves more easily in saliva than in cigarette smoke, cigar users absorb smoke and nicotine from cigars even when they report no inhalation. Small cigar smoking is associated with smoke inhalation that leads to significant exposure to nicotine, carbon monoxide, and presumably other components of tobacco smoke. Removing the inner paper liner does not substantially reduce toxin exposure.

Some cigar smokers indicate that they either did not know whether cigars were more or less harmful than cigarettes or perceived cigars to be less harmful than cigarettes. These misperceptions of the health risks were higher in specific demographic groups—young adults and black youth, in particular.

More students in eighth, 10th and 12th grades perceived a great risk in smoking one or more packs of cigarettes per day — 64.4%, 73% and 75.5% — compared to smoking little cigars or cigarillos regularly — 36.6%, 42.3% and 43.8%. More eighth and 10th grade students perceived a great risk in smoking one to five cigarettes per day — 39.3% and 48.8% — compared to smoking little cigars or cigarillos regularly.

In a nationally representative sample of young adults ages 18-34, more respondents rated cigars as less risky than cigarettes (13.9%) than they rated other tobacco products, including noncombustible snus (10%) and other smokeless tobacco products (7.1%).

PERCEPTIONS OF CIGARS IN THE U.S.

Cigar users significantly underestimate the health risks of cigars. Some cigar smokers indicate that they either did not know whether cigars were more or less harmful than cigarettes or perceived cigars to be less harmful than cigarettes. These misperceptions of the health risks were higher in specific demographic groups—young adults and black youth, in particular.

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INDUSTRY MARKETING

Cigar smoking in the United States rose dramatically in the 1990s and 2000s, in part due to cigar marketing strategies. **Cigar marketing is not subject to the same restrictions as cigarette marketing** [see Policy section, page 7].

- Recent studies have shown that **cigar companies package some small cigars to look similar to cigarettes** and sell them in the same places that cigarettes are sold. They also use **similar social media marketing tactics** that cigarette companies use, as well as previous cigarette company marketing tactics, such as **celebrity endorsements**.

- One study found that cigar, little cigar and cigarillo advertising on the exterior of retail outlets is **significantly more prevalent in neighborhoods with African Americans and young adults**. This study also showed that little cigars and cigarillos are more available, **cheaper** and highly advertised in **African American neighborhoods**.

- **Little cigars and cigarillos are available as singles**. By contrast, **single cigarettes or ”loosies,” which were popular in African American communities, were banned** by the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act. Little cigars and cigarillos are also available in pack sizes of less than 20, with some available in two-packs, five-packs, and seven-packs. Small packs tend to be cheaper than cigarettes, which may appeal to price sensitive populations such as youth and low-socioeconomic status populations.

- The increased visibility of cigar smoking from advertising and promotional activities is **”normalizing” cigar use**. Tobacco companies promote cigar smoking as pleasurable, a symbol of status, wealth and class.

The **1998 Master Settlement Agreement** and the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act prohibited cigarette and smokeless tobacco companies from sponsoring music, sports and other cultural events and creating branded merchandise because of evidence that linked these types of marketing tactics with youth tobacco use. Cigars are not bound by these restrictions, though the same concerns exist about the connection between these marketing tactics and youth tobacco use. A marketing campaign from **Swisher Sweets** is an example of how cigar companies take advantage of these loopholes in regulation.

**Swisher Sweets Artist Project**

Swisher Sweets Artist Project is a marketing campaign that holds music events with emerging artists, including pop-up performances in convenience stores — **”Convenience Store Sessions”** — and **concerts in select cities called ”Swisher Sweets Pack Nights.”** These events are hosted across the country and are set against the backdrop of Swisher Sweets ads, displays and clothes. Tickets for some locations included a voucher for packs of certain Swisher Sweets cigars and cigarillos. At other pack night locations, attendees could get special gear and giveaways.

Image credit: [www.swishersweets.com](http://www.swishersweets.com)
POLICY ENVIRONMENT

FDA REGULATION

In May 2016, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) finalized its “deeming” regulation, asserting the agency’s authority to regulate little cigars, cigarillos and premium cigars, as well as components and parts such as rolling papers and filters. The FDA can now issue product standards to make all cigars less appealing, toxic and addictive, and it can issue marketing restrictions like those in place for cigarettes, in order to keep cigars out of the hands of kids.

In order to receive marketing approval for a new product, a manufacturer would need to demonstrate that the new product would be “appropriate for the protection of the public health,” taking into account both the likelihood of new tobacco product initiation and the increased or decreased likelihood that existing users of current tobacco products would stop using such products.

The deeming regulation includes requirements for pre-market review for cigars on the market between February 15, 2007 and August 8, 2016 as new tobacco products. Many of the cigars on the market today were in distribution prior to February 15, 2007 and are therefore grandfathered.

In August 2017, the FDA pushed back the compliance date for cigar manufacturers to submit pre-market applications to August 2021.

In March 2018, a group of public health organizations, including Truth Initiative®, sued the FDA for unlawfully delaying the implementation of the deeming rule.

In May 2019, a federal judge ruled that the FDA had acted illegally by allowing cigars to remain on the market without formally reviewing their impact on public health. The judge ordered the FDA to commence the statutorily required review by May 12, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the court, at the FDA’s request, moved the date for review to September 9, 2020.

FLAVORS

There are currently no federal restrictions on flavored cigars.

In March 2018, the FDA issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking to request public comment to better understand the role that flavors in tobacco products play in attracting youth.

In March 2019, the FDA proposed to remove any flavored cigars that were on the market as of Aug. 8, 2016 and met the definition of a new tobacco product. In January 2020, the FDA issued a final guidance, but it only applies to e-cigarettes and does not apply to flavored cigars. The FDA also stated it was moving forward with a proposed rule to ban all characterizing flavors in cigars. As of June 2020, a proposed rule has not been issued by the FDA.

As of March 31, 2020, at least 105 localities in California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island have restricted the sale of flavored tobacco products, including flavored cigars.
**POINT OF SALE**

There are few federal regulations around point of sale marketing practices for cigars.

- Some localities have implemented minimum prices and packaging for cigars.
  - In New York City, cigars that cost less than $3 individually must be sold in packs of four or more and little cigars must be sold in packs of 20. Additionally, little cigars cannot be sold at retail for less than $13 per pack.
  - At least 173 municipalities in Massachusetts, including Boston, require single cigars to be sold for at least $2.50 and multi-packs of two or more cigars to be sold for at least $5. Minneapolis requires a minimum price for cigars of $2.60 for a single cigar, $5.20 for a 2-pack, $7.80 for a 3-pack, and $10.40 for packs of 4 or more cigars.
- Some localities such as Chicago, New York City and Providence, Rhode Island, have prohibited the redemptions of coupons and discounts for all tobacco products including cigars.

**TAXATION**

- The Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) of 2009 increased federal excise taxes on little cigars from $0.04 to $1.01 per pack of 20 — bringing the federal tax rate on little cigars on par with cigarettes.\(^{61}\)
- In 2009, following the federal tax increase on all tobacco products, several little cigar brands increased their weight slightly to qualify as “large cigars” under the federal tax code to receive a better tax rate. With this preferential tax treatment, these products became significantly cheaper.\(^{62}\)
- Cigar manufacturers increased weight by using fillers, such as the clay found in kitty litter, or stuffing the products with more tobacco to tip the scales in their favor. The new “large cigar” can appear almost identical to a “small cigar,” which resembles a typical cigarette and can cost as little as 7 cents per cigar.\(^{63}\) Small cigar manufacturers have capitalized on the visual similarities of small cigars and cigarettes in marketing.\(^{63}\) These tactics demonstrate the importance of product review.
- All states, except Florida and Pennsylvania, impose an excise tax on cigars.\(^{64}\)
WARNING LABELS

In 2001, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) established five cigar warnings for the top six selling brands, based on data from the National Cancer Institute Monograph on Cigars.\(^{65,66}\)

The FDA’s final “deeming” regulation extends these same warnings to all cigar brands and added an additional warning. On a rotating basis, cigar manufacturers must include the following six warnings statements on all cigar packages and advertisements:

- **WARNING:** This product contains nicotine. Nicotine is an addictive chemical.
- **WARNING:** Cigar smoking can cause cancers of the mouth and throat, even if you do not inhale.
- **WARNING:** Cigar smoking can cause lung cancer and heart disease.
- **WARNING:** Cigars are not a safe alternative to cigarettes.
- **WARNING:** Tobacco smoke increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease, even in nonsmokers.
- **WARNING:** Cigar use while pregnant can harm you and your baby. (Or, as an optional alternative statement: **SURGEON GENERAL WARNING:** Tobacco Use Increases the Risk of Infertility, Stillbirth, and Low Birth Weight.)

These warning statements were set to become effective May 10, 2018 but were placed on hold pending litigation by the cigar industry. In February 2020, a US district court judge ruled against the FDA and lifted the requirement for health warnings on premium cigar packages and advertisements. Litigation regarding the health warning requirements for other types of cigars is still pending.

YOUTH ACCESS AND MINIMUM AGE OF SALE

The FDA’s final “deeming” regulation established a federal minimum age of sale at 18 years old for all tobacco products, including cigars. In December 2019, the U.S. adopted a law raising the federal minimum age of sale for all tobacco products to 21 years old, effective immediately. Federal law requires retailers to check photo ID of everyone under age 27 who attempts to purchase cigars. Vigorous enforcement of these age requirements is necessary to reduce youth uptake.\(^{67}\)

The FDA’s final “deeming” regulation bans vending machine sales except in facilities where only those over 18 years old are allowed. The final rule also bans free samples of all cigars, and their components or parts.

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act required the FDA to issue regulations to establish age verification requirements for the Internet and other non-face-to-face purchase of any tobacco products. However, the FDA has yet to implement this set of regulations.\(^{68}\)
ACTION NEEDED: CIGARS

FEDERAL ACTION NEEDED

- **Extend marketing restrictions on cigarettes to cigars:** The FDA must restrict cigar marketing so that it does not target or appeal to youth. Specifically, the agency must immediately extend the marketing restrictions that apply to cigarettes to cigars. These include **prohibitions** on:
  - **Sponsorships** of sports and cultural events
  - **Self-service access to the products** (i.e., keeping the products behind the counter)
  - **Free gifts** with purchase, other than tobacco products (i.e., no branded t-shirts, hats, etc.)

- **FDA review:** The FDA must enforce its authority to require a full scientific review of all cigar products on the market after Feb. 15, 2007 to determine their impact on public health. The agency must adhere to the court-ordered date of September 2020.

- **Flavor restrictions:** We know flavors have overwhelmingly been used to attract those who have not previously used tobacco products. The FDA should **prohibit all characterizing flavors**, including menthol, in all cigar products.

- **Internet sales:** The FDA should **prohibit all non-face-to-face sales**, along with internet sales, of all tobacco products, including cigars.

- **Premium cigars:** Cigars, no matter the size or the price, are addictive and deadly combustible products and the decision to regulate premium cigars should not be revisited. While some regulatory approaches may need to adapt to the nature of the product and retail environment (for example, warning requirements for cigars sold as unpackaged single sticks), there is **no evidence to support exempting a combustible tobacco product from common sense regulations** such as ingredient listings, limitations on flavors, restrictions on marketing to youth, and product standards that would reduce the appeal, toxicity and addictiveness of the product.

- **Product packaging:** The FDA must **extend the retail restrictions on cigarette packaging to cigars**. The FDA must prohibit the sale of non-premium cigars in singles or two-packs or little cigars in packages containing fewer than 20 little cigars.

- **Taxation:** The current federal tax policy makes cigars the cheaper alternative to cigarettes. The **cigar tax disparity should be reduced** so that cigar manufacturers are unable to manipulate the weight of their products and avoid regulation.

- **Nicotine levels:** The FDA should **issue a product standard to reduce nicotine levels in all combustible products**, including all cigar products, to non-addictive levels.
STATE AND LOCAL ACTION NEEDED

States and local communities are often the incubators of strong tobacco control policies. They have an important role to play when it comes to protecting youth and young adults from cigar use as well. Some examples include:

- **Clean indoor air:** State and local governments should **require cigar use to be subject to clean indoor air laws** and requirements. Cigar bar exemptions should be avoided.

- **Flavor restrictions:** Many local jurisdictions have taken action to **restrict or prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products**, including cigars. Truth Initiative supports such actions because they limit the availability of such highly appealing tobacco products to youth.

- **Minimum pricing:** Some local jurisdictions **require cigars to be sold at a minimum price**. Truth Initiative supports such actions because as the price of tobacco products increases, fewer people will use these products.
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