



Little Cigars... Big Concerns



Key Messages

- Smoking little cigars poses the same risk of harmful health effects as smoking cigarettes.
- The origin and type of tobacco used in little cigars are different to that used in cigarettes sold in Canada.
- The smoke from little cigars contains the same chemicals as the smoke from cigarettes sold in Canada.

Background

Traditionally, cigars have three components – a filler, a binder and a wrapper – made from either natural or processed leaf tobacco. Little cigars (or “cigarillos”) are the smallest type of cigars available on the market. They are similar in size to a cigarette, and often include a filter. Most filtered little cigars have a brown wrapper made of processed tobacco. These look like a cigarette wrapped in brown paper. On the other hand, little cigars without filters are generally wrapped in tobacco leaves. **Figure 1** shows the difference between a cigarette, little cigars, and a cigar.

Reported sales of little cigars have increased significantly between 2001 and 2007. Sales of 53 million units in 2001 increased to 276 million units in 2006, and then to 403 million units in 2007. These products have been sold in appealing flavours and in single units or in small packs.

These widely available little cigars appeal to young Canadians. A surveillance study, the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS), conducted over the first half of 2008 found that 37% of Canadian respondents aged 15 years and older reported smoking a little cigar at least once, and 4% reported smoking one

within the past 30 days. Among youth aged 15 to 17 years, 24% reported smoking a little cigar at least once, and 7% reported smoking one within the past 30 days. Among youth and young adults aged 18 to 24 years, 49% reported smoking a little cigar at least once, and 13% reported smoking one within the past 30 days.



Figure 1: The difference between a cigarette, little cigars with filter, little cigars without filter, and a cigar (left to right)

Currently, we know that lighting up a cigarette forms over 4,000 different chemicals. At least 70 of these chemicals are known to cause, trigger or promote cancer. But is the risk of harmful health effects the same for little cigars?



A little cigar with filter (left) and a cigarette

Results

In order to assess the potential health impact of little cigars, Health Canada compared their smoke emission to that of cigarettes sold in Canada. The study analysed 27 toxic substances in the smoke of both products. This research confirmed that the smoke of little cigars, either with or without filters, contains the same toxic chemicals present in the smoke of cigarettes sold in Canada.

The composition of tobacco smoke may vary slightly depending on the country in which the tobacco is grown (its origin), its type (Burley, Virginia, etc.), and its curing process (flue-curing, air-curing, etc.). Based on the study, concentration levels of some toxic chemicals in the smoke of little cigars were slightly different to those levels found in the smoke of cigarettes sold in Canada. These minor differences suggest that tobacco of different origin and type was used in each case. Nevertheless, exposure to the concentration of toxic chemicals found in the smoke of little cigars poses the same risk of harmful health effects as for cigarettes sold in Canada.



A cigar (left) and a little cigar without filter

Conclusion

Health Canada considers that smoking little cigars poses the same risk of harmful health effects as smoking cigarettes sold in Canada.

References

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