

CIGARILLOS **May 2008**

Mini-cigars, or cigarillos, have recently become a popular choice among young Canadian smokers. They are considered to be “cigars” since they are tobacco-wrapped, but look more cigarette-like. Most are filtered and the same size as (or smaller than) cigarettes. Cigarillos are often fruit, candy or alcohol-flavoured, and can be purchased in any convenience store either as singles in plastic tubes (such as “Prime Time”) or in packs of 4-8, with prices ranging from 69¢/individual cigarillo to a few dollars for a pack of 8. Flavours include cherry, vanilla, chocolate, piña colada, grape, apple, mint, strawberry and peach, among others.

There are no health warnings on individually-sold cigarillos in wraps or tubes, and not all cigarillo packages have the correct required Health Canada warning.

In Ontario, there are no controls either on flavouring, package size, product size or (in the case of single units) health warning requirements. Nor does the federal government control any of these aspects of cigarillo products.

Research on cigarillo emissions conducted by Health Canada¹ shows that cigarillos deliver higher levels of toxicants than cigarettes (that is, much higher nitrosamines (one of the most potent carcinogens in tobacco), hydrogen cyanide and nitrogen-based compounds), and that non-filtered products have higher yields than filtered products.

For the first time, Health Canada included questions on cigarillos in its annual Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) in the first six months of 2007. Data released in January 2008 and analyzed by Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada showed that young Canadians are as likely to experiment with cigarillos as cigarettes, and that young people have three times the rates of cigarillo use as adults.²

The data showed that many young cigarillo users do not smoke cigarettes, and are not currently included in estimates of youth smoking. Although the survey showed that only 15% of Canadian youth smoke cigarettes, a further 5% have smoked a cigarillo in the past month, but are not counted as smokers by the surveyors. If these latter young people are considered to be smokers, then the smoking rate among young Canadians would increase to 20%.

In Ontario, the survey showed that among 15-19 year-old boys, 141,188 had ever tried cigarettes, compared with 138,758 who had ever tried cigarillos. No data were available for young women.

Founding Agencies

Canadian Cancer Society
Ontario Division

Heart and Stroke
Foundation of Ontario

Non-Smokers'
Rights Association

Ontario Lung Association

Ontario Medical Association

Supporting Agencies

Association of Local
Public Health Agencies

Cancer Care Ontario

Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

Ontario Association of
Naturopathic Doctors

Ontario Federation of Home
and School Associations

Ontario Physical and Health
Education Association

Ontario Public Health
Association

Physicians for a
Smoke-Free Canada

Registered Nurses
Association of Ontario

The Ontario College
of Family Physicians

525 University Ave.
Suite 200
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2K7

t: 416.340.2992
f: 416.340.2995
email: ocata@oma.org
www.ocat.org

¹ “Little Cigars – Big Concerns”, Levasseur, G; Hutchings, H; Kaiserman, MJ, authors of research, Evaluation and Surveillance, Tobacco Control Program, Health Canada. (http://www.cqct.qc.ca/Documents_docs/DOCU_2008/DOCU_07_00_00_HC_LittleCigars.pdf). Poster presentation, 61st Tobacco Science Research Conference, Charlotte, NC, USA. 23-26 September 2007.

² “Cigarillo smoking in Canada: A Review of Results from CTUMS, Wave 1, 2007”, Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada (http://www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/cigarillos-2008.pdf), February 2008.