



Flavored Cigars

Cigar Definitions used by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM)¹

Filtered/Little Cigar	Usually brown and have a cigarette-like filter; are made on the same machines as cigarettes; and are similar in size and shape as cigarettes. Weigh <3 pounds per 1000 cigars. Filtered cigars weigh slightly more and are taxed as large cigars
Cigarillo	Medium-sized machine-made cigars that sometimes come with plastic or wood tips. Weigh >3 pounds per 1000 cigars.
Traditional/Large Cigars	Nontipped, machine-made; tend to be larger than cigarillos and weigh >3 pounds per 1000
Premium Cigars	Has 6 characteristics: handmade, filler composed of at least 50% natural long-leaf tobacco, wrapped in whole leaf tobacco, weigh at least 6 pounds per 1000 cigars, no filter or tips, no characterizing flavor other than tobacco.

NOTE: These are working definitions from the NASEM and NOT intended as regulatory definitions. Importantly, there is no single, consistent definition for “premium cigars” that is agreed upon by regulators, industry, and others. “Consequently, there is no clear distinction between premium and large nonpremium cigars or even with other cigar types (e.g., filtered/little cigars and cigarillos).”⁴

BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act gave the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to regulate tobacco products. This authority was applied to cigarettes, cigarette tobacco, roll-your-own, and smokeless tobacco.¹ The law also allowed the FDA to expand its reach by “deeming” other types of tobacco products subject to FDA regulation, and in 2016 the FDA broadened its authority to include all tobacco products, including all types of cigars.¹ At the time, the FDA indicated there was no public health justification to exempt any type of cigar from regulatory oversight. This is consistent with the evidence that no cigar is a healthier cigar. However, since legislation to exempt premium cigars from FDA regulation have been introduced, but none have made it out of the chamber of Congress they were introduced.¹ The cigar category of products includes filtered/little cigars, cigarillos, traditional/large cigars, and premium cigars, and as a whole can be defined as, “a tobacco product that is not a cigarette and is a roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or a substance containing tobacco.”¹ Importantly, there are no formal or regulatory definitions for any type of cigars, thus no distinction between any type of cigar. For this document the term “cigar” will be used when discussing cigars in general and will specify type of cigar when appropriate.

Little cigars, cigarillos and large cigars are sold in many flavors, including different flavors of alcohol, fruit flavors, chocolate and menthol. Per the definition from NASEM, premium cigars are not flavored but many premium cigar companies sell flavored cigars.¹ Also, there are a few companies that sell large handmade cigars that use whole leaf wrapping and long filler tobacco (resembling NASEM-defined premium cigars) in a variety of flavors.¹ Together, along with no clear definition, it is difficult for the general public to distinguish between NASEM-defined premium cigar and the “premiumization” (term defined below) of large cigars. Between 2009 and 2020, convenience store total sales of cigars increased 33%, with flavored cigar sales increasing almost 57% and non-flavored cigar sales only increasing about 12%.² Between 2011 and 2012, flavored cigars took over the majority share of the market, with sweet/candy flavors (31% of the flavored cigar market) and fruit flavors (30% of the flavored cigar market) as the most popular flavored cigars in 2020.² During this time-frame, there was also a shift in pack size, with between 77% and 92% of sales in packs of 5 or less, with annual sales of packs of 2 or 3 increasing 140% per year between 2009 and 2020 and making up almost 43% of the market share in 2020 (largest market share of any package count).² Between May 2020 and April 2021, convenience stores had \$3.9 billion in sales of cigars, with one cigar proponent indicating that a ban on flavored cigars would cause a drop in sales “since many consumers are drawn to the sweetness and mildness of flavored cigars.”³

FACT SHEET: Flavored Cigars

Flavored cigars now make up a little more than 53% of the cigar marketplace.² Studies of flavored little cigars and cigarillos have found the negative impact (death) to cells in the airway to be the same as non-flavored cigars, but there is evidence to suggest within the flavored cigar category that fruit, candy, and alcoholic beverage flavors are the most toxic.^{4,5} It is well established that younger tobacco users by-and-large prefer flavored products, and youth initiation of tobacco products is related to the availability of appealing flavors. Flavorings appear to make the tobacco smoke more palatable and may influence users to expect positive effects on the feel and taste.¹ In recently published findings, menthol flavored product use was associated with more difficulty quitting, particularly for Black men.⁶ There have been many state and local flavor restrictions enacted, and in April 2022 the FDA released a proposed rule to ban flavored cigars.

PREVALENCE

- Of pooled data from 2010 to 2019 of U.S. cigar users, use was highest among younger adults (7.5%), Black adults (6.5%), and adults who identified as bisexual (6.3%).¹
- In 2019, about 70% of young adult Black cigar smokers used flavored cigars. Among all adult cigar smokers, alcohol flavors are the most frequently smoked (34.4%), followed by sweet flavors (23.4%) and mint (5.7%).¹
- The Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) study demonstrated that between 74% and 76% of youth (12-17 years old) and young adults (18-24 years old) report using cigars because they come in “flavors I like”, and between 81% and 86% of youth and young adults who ever used tobacco reported a flavored product as their first tobacco product.⁹
- In the 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), about 5.3% of adolescents were current cigar smokers, which was a slight increase from 2017 and 2018.¹⁰ The 2020 NYTS demonstrated that 3.5%, or roughly 960,000, youth were current cigar users; a 34% decrease in prevalence.⁷ During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many schools were closed to in-person learning, current cigar use was reported to be 1.5% (Due to methodologic changes in data acquisition due to the COVID-9 pandemic, the 2021 data cannot be compared to previous years).¹¹
- Since at least 2017, rates of cigar and cigarette smoking have not been significantly different from one another among youth smokers, and these products have been second or third most used products behind e-cigarettes.
- Of the current youth cigar users, between 44% and 57% used flavored cigars.^{11,12} In 2020, flavored cigar use was most prevalent with Hispanic youth cigar smokers (69%), followed by White (57%) and Black (45%) youths.¹² In 2021, these were more similar with 46% of Black, 45% of Hispanic and 44% of White cigar smokers reporting flavor use.¹¹ Fruit flavored cigars consistently appear to be the preferred flavor reported by 51% to 65% of youth users.^{11,14}

Current Adult (“every day” or “some days”) and Adolescent (past 30-days) Cigar Smokers from 2020 ^{7,8}		
	Adults	Adolescents
Overall	3.5%	3.5%
Black	4.6%	6.5%
White	3.8%	2.8%
Hispanic	2.2%	4.0%
Asian	0.9%	--*
*Limited data size prohibited calculation. American Indian/Native Alaskan not included in the table due limited data size for both adults and adolescents		

MARKETING

- As previously mentioned, the vast majority of sales of cigars are in packs of <5 sticks.² Notably, between 2020 and 2021, the market share for individually wrapped cigars grew substantially.³ The president of Chambers & Owen Inc. (a wholesale cigar distributor) indicated that the most popular sales are “two-for-99-cents”, “three-for-\$1.29”, and “save-on-two”.³ Furthermore, retailers can offer savings passed to customers when manufacturers fund product buydowns, and some retailers offer points-based loyalty programs that can be redeemed on cigar purchases.³
 - These types of strategies may be more appealing to youth users due to lower cost and fewer cigars to store.



FACT SHEET: Flavored Cigars

- Almost 91% of cigar sales occurs in convenience stores and gas stations where young people visit frequently,² and in these stores the use of eye-level window signs, shelf talkers and ad displays at the register are effective sales tools.³
- The cigar industry utilizes a range of strategies that are used by the general tobacco industry, which centers on developing positive perceptions to persuade nonusers to start and current users to continue.¹
 - Including the tailored and targeting marketing to specific populations (youth, women, and communities of color). These include sponsoring music festivals and promoting urban lifestyle, hip-hop, and rock music.¹
 - This may include expanding on product placement in television shows, movies, music videos, and online gaming.
- “Premiumization” is a deceitful practice used in marketing by tobacco products to entice consumers to use more expensive products by indicating they are of better quality and (wrongly) less harmful than mid-range or discount brands; using certain language to perpetuate the idea:¹
 - “Premium” – associated with an exclusive and rewarding experience, as well as superior craftsmanship.
 - “Handmade” or “Hand-rolled” – gives impression of higher quality
 - Other terms that convey positive aspects: “organic”, “natural”, or “additive-free”
- Relating to “premiumization”, a recent study found that little cigar and cigarillo ads near schools to have premium branding for explicitly flavored (e.g., grape) products and implicit health claims for ambiguous flavored products (e.g., Jazz).¹⁵



HEALTH EFFECTS OF CIGARS

- Studies evaluating the constituents of cigar smoke have consistently found the components of cigar smoke to be the same as cigarette smoke.^{16,17} Though nicotine content of each type of cigar varies,¹⁷ a single cigar may provide as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes.¹⁸
 - The addictive, toxic, and carcinogenic constituents of cigar tobacco and cigar smoke are the same as those found in cigarette smoke.¹
 - The National Cancer Institute indicates that cigar smoking causes cancer of mouth, larynx, esophagus, and lungs.¹⁸ Daily cigar smokers are at higher risk of heart disease and lung disease.¹⁸
 - A study of regular cigar users suggest they self-adjust smoking patterns (number, time between, and depth of inhalations) based on the type of cigar so that nicotine exposure is about the same as cigarette smoking.¹⁶ Concurrent/former cigarette smokers inhale more smoke from premium cigars than exclusive users of premium cigars.¹
 - The pH of large cigars smoke is generally higher than cigarette smoke, which can decrease the depth of inhalation and increase oral nicotine absorption.¹

FACT SHEET: Flavored Cigars

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