

Policy Paper

Cigarillos – Children at Play, Children at Risk.



Picture courtesy of Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du tabac
http://www.cqct.qc.ca/Communiqués_docs/2008/PRSS_08_04_08_ConferenceDePresseCigarillos.htm

April 2009

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INTRODUCTION

A cigarillo is a product composed of tobacco wrapped in tobacco leaves, as opposed to a cigarette which is wrapped in paper. Cigarillos generally weigh between 1.5 and 3.0 g, and are sometimes referred to as “little cigars”.¹ This product appeals to younger generations due to its flashy and fun packaging, its availability in numerous candy and fruit flavours, its lack of proper (or sometimes, any) health risk warnings and its affordability. In fact, the Global Tobacco Control Forum* reported that “a package of 4 Twinkle cigarillos costs \$2, compared with a minimum price for a package of cigarettes of \$5.50”.² Cigarillos have gained a staggering popularity in Canada where sales soared from 50 000 cigarillos in 2001 to 80 million in 2006.³

Although the risks of cigarette smoking are widely known and advertised, social awareness of the issue of cigarillos seems to be dismal at best. In seeking to discuss this issue openly, this paper will begin with an overview of cigarillo epidemiology. Secondly, we will present the current regulations for cigarillos and discuss the principle of targeted marketing by tobacco companies. Thirdly, we will discuss the toxic effects of cigarillos and misconceptions regarding these effects. Finally, we will present current progress being made in increasing regulations on cigarillos and recommend further actions to be taken.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

Traditional measurements of smoking did not include cigarillos as a distinct category of tobacco products. However, given their popularity among adolescents, Health Canada has started tracking their usage separately as of 2006-2007. The results for the first half of 2008 (February to June) of Health Canada’s Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey clearly indicate that cigarillos continue to be a product mostly used by youth below the age of 19. Adolescents aged between 15 and 19 have significantly higher rates of cigarillo smoking, about three times more, compared to adults aged 19 and older. In fact, 11% from the first group versus 4% from the second group reported smoking only little cigars.⁴

The 2006-2007 Youth Smoking Survey, a biennial survey sponsored by Health Canada, shows that 9.5% of Canadian students in grades 5 to 9 and 34.7% of Canadian students in grades 10 to 12 have tried cigarillos. It is also reported that 20.6% of students from grades 7 to 9 purchased cigarillos from the store, 4.1% bought them from siblings, 36.2% from friends and 19.8% asked someone else to buy for them. Furthermore, 34.4% of students from grades 10 to 12 purchased cigarillos from the store, 3.0% bought them from siblings, 19.5% bought from friends and 17.1% asked someone else to buy for them (*Figure 1*). It is also reported that 18.5% of Canadian students in grades 5 to 9 and 48.2% of Canadian students in grades 10 to 12 have tried cigarettes, rates that are disturbingly comparable to those of cigarillos (*Figure 2*).⁵

* Member agencies of the Global Tobacco Control Forum are the Canadian Cancer Society, la Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du tabac, HealthBridge, the Non-Smokers’ Rights Association, the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada.

Figure 1. Sources of little cigars / cigarillos in the last 30 days among individuals who have smoked cigars / cigarillos / little cigars in the last 30 days, by grouped grades, Canada, 2006-07

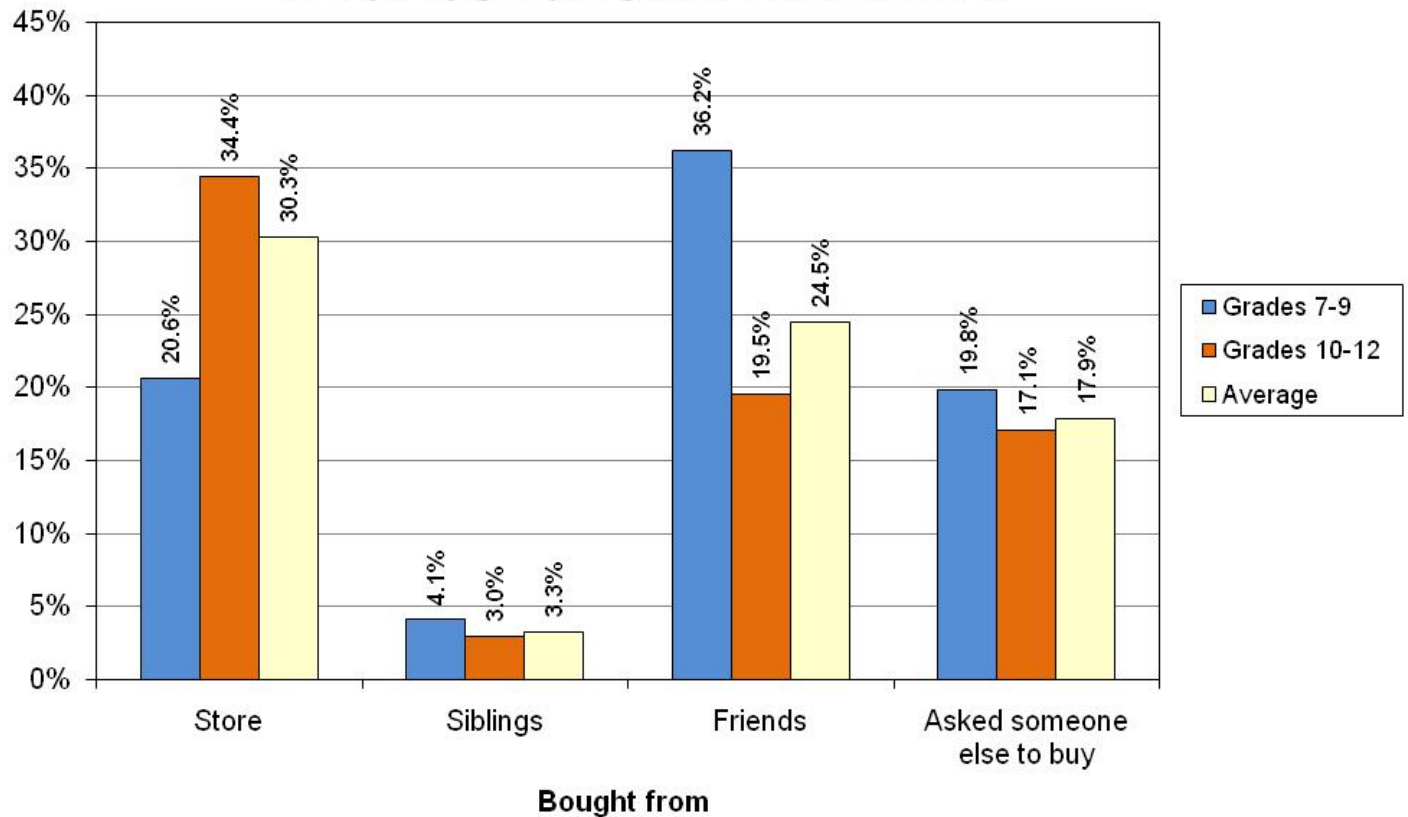
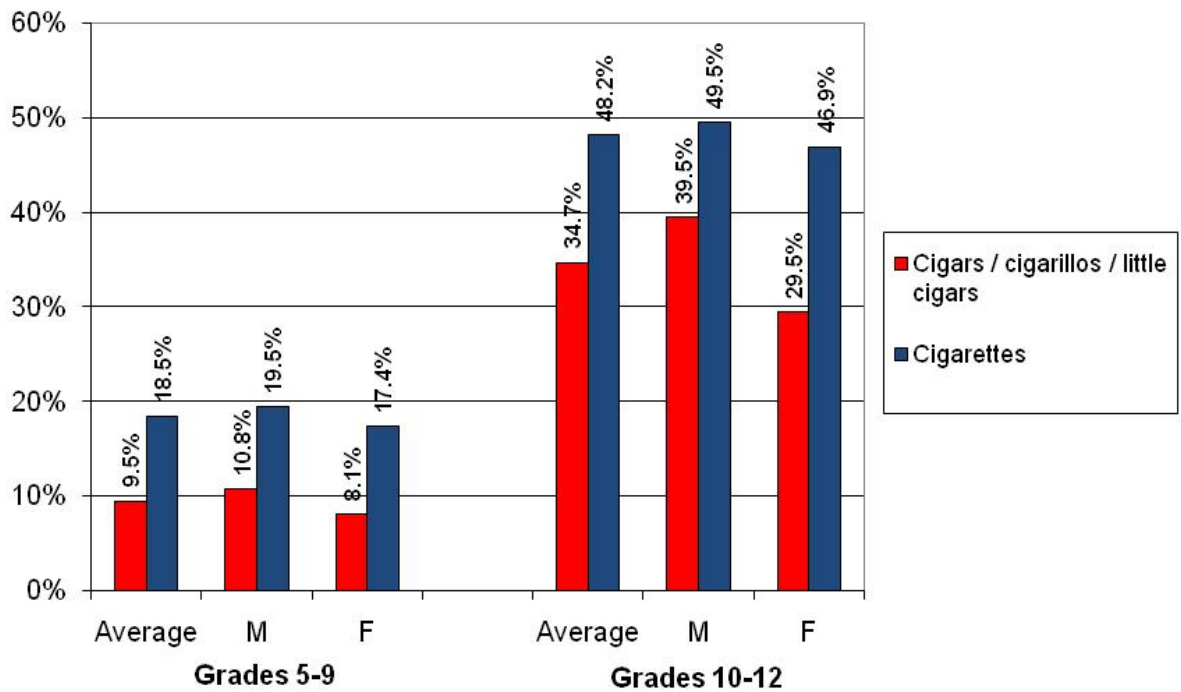


Figure 2. Ever tried cigars / cigarillos / little cigars vs. cigarettes by sex and grouped grades, Canada, 2006-07



CONCERNS

Concern One: Regulations on cigarillos are not strict enough to discourage usage by youth.

Canadian law imposes strict regulations on cigarettes but given that cigarillos are cigars by definition (due to the nature of their wrapping), they are not subject to the same rules. This ambiguity has given ready-to-exploit tobacco companies ample room to better market their cigarillo products. The Global Tobacco Control Forum has presented the following comparison:⁶

Cigarettes	Cigarillos (and cigars)
Must have a health warning that covers no less than 50% of the package front and back.	If sold in bundles or boxes, must have a health warning occupying 13% to 27% of a principal display space, depending on the size of the package. The health warning does not have to be on both sides of the package, and may be located only on the back of a product package. If they are sold in individual units, they do not have to have a health warning at all.
Cannot be sold in packages with fewer than 20 cigarettes.	There is no minimum pack size. Cigarillos can be sold individually or in small 'kiddy packs'.
Must have toxic constituent information on the side of the package (tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, formaldehyde, benzene)	They do not have to have any toxic constituent labels.
Inside each package, there must be a health information message, designed to help smokers quit.	They do not have to have any health information messages inside the package.
There are no bans on flavourings in cigarettes, but there are very few cigarettes that are flavoured with anything other than menthol.	There are no bans on flavourings, and cigarillos are sold in such flavours as: cherry, appletini, cosmo (cranberry with a hint of orange), strawberry, peach, vanilla, raspberry, pina colada, cinnamon, peach, chocolate mint, coconut, wild berry, rum, tangerine, grape.

Concern Two: The tobacco industry recognizes adolescents as being essential to their market and targets them directly through marketing.

While the tobacco industry maintains that tobacco promotion is used exclusively to maintain and expand market shares of adult consumers, evidence demonstrates that adolescents are also influenced to start smoking by such campaigns.^{7,8} Internal tobacco industry documents that have been made public reveal that tobacco manufacturers are aware that young people are vital to their market and emphasize the need to advertise their products to them in order to promote future generations of smokers.⁹ However, direct advertising to adolescents has become increasingly difficult in Canada due to stricter regulations on the promotion of tobacco products which are enforced by the Canadian Tobacco Act. This industry has therefore had to develop new strategies to target young people in order to recruit new customers.

A considerable amount of research, conducted by the tobacco industry on young people, has identified the importance of product innovation, pricing, packaging and indirect advertising to ensure the successful marketing of their products.^{10,11, 12} Product innovation includes the use of flavour additives in order to make smoking more appealing and palatable, as this has been shown to increase experimentation, especially amongst adolescents.¹³ Price has also been shown to be an important factor in influencing sales of tobacco products to youth, and therefore reductions in cost have been associated with increased consumption by adolescents.¹⁴

Packaging of the tobacco product in an attractive and youthful manner creates the impression that they are less dangerous and makes them more youth friendly. Indirect advertising includes the promotion of tobacco products through various forms of entertainment media, such as films and television.¹⁵

In the case of cigarillos, the tobacco industry has taken advantage of poor regulations in order to apply the aforementioned strategies for the sake of promoting this product to young people. Such marketing has also contributed to the incorrect perception among some young people that cigarillos are less harmful than regular cigarettes.¹⁶ This highlights the need to develop stronger tobacco control strategies that actively counter the youth-targeted marketing developed by the tobacco industry, particularly at the level of cigarillos where concerning loopholes in regulation exist.

Concern Three: Cigarillos are perceived as a less harmful alternative to cigarettes.

Cigarillos are incorrectly perceived as being less harmful than regular cigarettes due to flavours that disguise the tobacco taste as well as packaging that is youth-friendly and devoid of health warnings. A recent study of the harm perception of various tobacco products in college students found that 17.4% of respondents believed cigarillos were less harmful than cigarettes.¹⁷ One can only extrapolate what percentage of younger students and youth share this same view, but it would likely be quite higher.

Although the harmful and carcinogenic effects of cigarette and cigar smoking have been well documented and researched, those of cigarillos specifically have not yet been the focus of extensive research. However, cigarillos are now under closer scrutiny by health care professionals and researchers due to their recent surge in popularity. A Health Canada study reports that cigarillos deliver higher levels of toxicants than cigarettes¹⁸ and furthermore, the Canadian Cancer Society highlights that cigarillos contain several times more tobacco than cigarettes.¹⁹ Given the fact that cigarette and cigarillo smokers might inhale smoke differently which could affect the level of harm caused by the latter, we cannot infer that cigarillos are more harmful than cigarettes. Nonetheless, a European study has shown that the odds ratio of lung cancer for pure smokers of cigarillos is 12.7 (6.9-23.7), compared to 14.9 (12.3-18.1) for pure smokers of cigarettes and 1.0 for non-smokers.²⁰

Interestingly, the age at which the subjects took up this habit also had a strong effect on the odds ratio. Those having started at or before the age of 19 were five times more at risk than those who did at or after the age of 27.²¹ This is particularly worrisome as it has been acknowledged that cigarillos are a product mostly used by youth below the age of 19. As previously discussed, adolescents aged between 15 and 19 have rates of cigarillo smoking that are three times higher than those of adults aged 19 and older.²² Moreover, providing that most smokers take up the habit before the age of 18,²³ cigarillos may act as a “training-wheels” product to future cigarette smoking based on a common nicotine addiction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

BRIEF HISTORY

On May 7, 2008, Joan Massey, member of the Legislative assembly of Nova Scotia, introduced Bill 159 to prohibit the sale of flavoured cigarillos (other than a few exceptions)[†] by amending the Tobacco Access Act.²⁴ That same month, Health Canada wrote a “Proposal to Regulate Little Cigars under the Tobacco (Access)

[†] The following flavours are exempt: rum, sugar, tobacco and wine.

Regulations” in which it recommended setting the minimum allowable number of cigarillos per package to 20 in order to financially discourage youth from purchasing the product. The report also asked if “little cigars” should be regulated as cigarettes under the Tobacco Products Information Regulations, in terms of proper health warnings.²⁵

On June 16, 2008, Member of Parliament Judy Wasylycia-Leis introduced a Private Member’s Bill (Bill C-566) which stated that “no person shall sell cigarettes or cigarillos except in a package that contains at least twenty cigarettes or cigarillos, or at least a prescribed number of cigarettes or cigarillos, which number shall be more than twenty”; “no manufacturer or retailer shall sell a tobacco product that includes a flavouring agent other than sugar, tobacco, tobacco extracts or reconstituted tobacco” and “no manufacturer or retailer shall sell a package of pipe tobacco or cigars unless the package bears on two principal display surfaces a health warning label occupying at least 50% of the panel”.²⁶

As of July 24, 2008 in the province of Quebec, tobacco products (including cigarillos) must be sold in a package containing a minimum of 10 units except if the cost is greater than \$5.00 (\$10.00 as of June 1, 2009).²⁷

On September 17, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, pledged that a re-elected Conservative Government will ban “kiddy packs” of cigarillos and other tobacco products by setting a minimum package size for cigarillos to reduce affordability for youth, by prohibiting flavours that appeal to children and by banning all tobacco advertising which may be viewed and read by youth.²⁸

On December 5, 2008, Ontario became the first province to ban the sale of flavoured cigarillos and to instate a minimum package size of 20 cigarillos, after passing a Private Member’s Bill (Bill 124), introduced by MPPs France Gélinas and David Levac.²⁹

CFMS RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The CFMS agrees with the position taken by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in September 2008. However, we call on the Conservative Party to no longer delay in delivering on this promise as this puts the health of Canadian youth at stake. We also call on the general public and people from the medical community to contact their local Member of Parliament (MP) in order to ensure their support for the proposed legislation (Bill C-566). The name and contact information for your member of parliament can be found using your postal code at: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
2. The CFMS calls on the general public and people from the medical community to also contact the local representative of their provincial or territorial government in order to inquire about the efforts being made to regulate cigarillos.
3. The CFMS endorses the recommendations set by the Global Tobacco Control Forum:³⁰
 - a. Canada should move immediately to require all tobacco products to be sold with a health warning label that is no smaller than 50% of the principal display areas of the package.
 - b. All tobacco products should be subject to a minimum package size or price sufficient to deter youth trial and uptake. Regulations to require this should be accelerated.
 - c. In order to reduce the attractiveness of these products to youth, packaging must be appropriate to the risks of using them. Tobacco companies should thus be prohibited from selling tobacco products in packages that resemble commonplace or harmless youth objects, like markers and lip-gloss.
 - d. Tobacco companies should be prevented from using flavourings given that flavor additives make smoking more appealing and palatable and this, in turn, increases experimentation amongst adolescents.

4. Medical students across Canada learn the most basic of clinical skills, history taking, during their first years of medical training. After patient identification, the medical student is taught to inquire about everything from the chief complaint to the patient's social history. The student must also ask about alcohol and drug use, as well as smoking. However, the latter usually only refers to cigarette smoking, and adolescents who are not asked *specifically* about smoking cigarillos might disregard its importance. It is recommended that an education module be developed for the purpose of educating medical students about the health effects of cigarillos and the high prevalence of their use in Canadian youth.

CONCLUSION

The prevention of chronic disease has been identified as a priority to medical students from across Canada. Since smoking is associated with a variety of negative health outcomes, including chronic disease, all measures should be taken to reduce levels of smoking. The vast majority of smokers begin their smoking careers as teenagers. This is recognized by the tobacco industry and has resulted in the development of targeted marketing of tobacco products towards young people as demonstrated by cigarillos. Cigarillo consumption in Canada has increased drastically in recent years especially amongst youth. This is of considerable concern since cigarillos are associated with negative health effects and have the potential to promote future consumption of tobacco products. Therefore, actions to promote stricter regulations on the promotion of cigarillos should be made a priority for tobacco control efforts in order to protect youth from this influence and prevent the development of future generations of smokers. Medical students have the potential to play a vital role in this process by advocating for political change and increasing awareness.

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² Global Tobacco Control Forum. (2008). *The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in Canada - a Civil Society 'Shadow Report'*. Retrieved April 2009, from http://www.smoke-free.ca/eng_issues/global/content/globalforum-shadow-report-2008-final-web.pdf, page 12.

³ Health Canada. (2008, May). *A Proposal to Regulate Little Cigars under the Tobacco (Access) Regulations*. Retrieved April 2009, from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/commun/consultation/_cigar/background-contexte-eng.php

⁴ Health Canada. (2009, March). *Summary of Results for the First Half of 2008 (February - June)*. Retrieved April 2009, from *Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS)*: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/research-recherche/stat/_ctums-esutc_2008/wave-phase-1_summary-sommaire-eng.php

⁵ Manske SR, Thompson, M, Brown KS, and the Youth Smoking Survey Collaborative. *Results of Canada's 2006-2007 Youth Smoking Survey*. Health Canada. Table 3 - *Ever tried a tobacco product by sex and grouped grades, Canada, 2006-07*, Table 18 - *Ever tried cigars / cigarillos / little cigars by sex and grouped grades, Canada, 2006-07* and Table 20 - *Sources of little cigars / cigarillos in the last 30 days among individuals who have smoked cigars / cigarillos / little cigars in the last 30 days, by grouped grades, Canada, 2006-07*. Retrieved April 2009, from https://www.yss.uwaterloo.ca/ysssite_app/controller/index.cfm

⁶ Global Tobacco Control Forum. (2008). *The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in Canada - a Civil Society 'Shadow Report'*. Retrieved April 2009, from http://www.smoke-free.ca/eng_issues/global/content/globalforum-shadow-report-2008-final-web.pdf, page 11.

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