

Flavored Cigars

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

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 applied to cigarettes, cigarette tobacco, roll-your-own, and smokeless tobacco. 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, they have made it out of the chamber of Congress they were introduced. The cigar category of products includes filtered/bigrars, cigarillos, additional/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.”² Importantly, there are no formal 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.³ Also, there are a few companies that sell large hand-rolled cigars that use whole leaf wrapping and long filler tobacco (resembling NASEM-defined premium cigars) in a variety of flavors. Together, along with no clear definition, it is difficult for the general public to distinguish between NASEM-defined premium cigars and the “premiumization” (term defined below) of large cigars. Between 2009 and 2020, domestic total sales of cigars increased 33%, with flavored cigar sales increasing almost 57% and non-flavored cigar sales only increasing about 12%.⁴ 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. 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 2019 and 2020 and making up almost 43% of market share in 2020 (largest market share of any package count).⁵ 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.”

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Flavored cigars now make up a little more than 53% of the cigar market. Studies of flavored little cigars and cigarillos have found the negative impact (death) 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. 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. Flavors appear to make the tobacco smoke more palatable and may influence users to expect positive effects on the feel and taste. A recently published findings

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References

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