Flavored products play an important role in tobacco harm reduction

There are more than [30 million](#) smokers in the United States. Almost [500,000](#) Americans die of smoking-related diseases each year. Since the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was tasked with regulating tobacco products in 2009, a host of safer nicotine alternatives to cigarettes have entered the market. The FDA has sought to incorporate these products as part of a harm reduction strategy where smokers who are unwilling or unable to quit cigarettes through traditional methods can switch to safer forms of nicotine consumption.

The FDA recognizes a "continuum of risk" when it comes to nicotine products, with cigarettes being the most dangerous and products like e-cigarettes and oral nicotine being far less dangerous. To be sold in the United States, these nicotine products must apply to the FDA and be found to provide a net benefit to public health. The FDA has already authorized several such products, including e-cigarettes, snus, and heated tobacco products, and products in flavors like menthol, mint, and wintergreen.

Flavors and adult preferences

- Most smokers who switch to safer nicotine alternatives [use](#) flavored products, a study *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* finds. The FDA [authorizes](#) several of these products as appropriate for the protection of public health because they are safer than cigarettes, help smokers quit, and don't increase youth use of nicotine.

- Another study in *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* shows that smokers who switch to e-cigarettes are likelier to quit smoking [successfully](#) when using a flavored product.

- According to [modeling](#) cited by the FDA, almost half of the benefits of a policy banning menthol cigarettes would come from menthol smokers switching to safer nicotine products, like e-cigarettes, with menthol flavoring.

- Survey [data](#) published in *Addictive Behaviors* shows that if flavored e-cigarette products were banned, 28 percent of vapers say they would still buy them on the black market. Almost 20 percent say if their preferred flavors were prohibited, they'd switch back to smoking cigarettes, which is significantly more dangerous than vaping.

Youth vaping and unintended consequences of flavor bans

- While youth tobacco use is always of deep concern, fortunately, youth smoking is at a generational low of 1.6 percent, in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and youth vaping has fallen by more than 50 percent since its [peak](#) in 2019 to [below](#) 10 percent in 2022.

- According to the CDC, the primary [reasons](#) young people say they vape is peer influence, curiosity, and stress—not flavors.

- Banning flavored nicotine products can produce unintended consequences. Yale University's Abigail Friedman found that after San Francisco banned flavored products, the [odds](#) of San Francisco area youth smoking doubled.

- The Massachusetts Multi-Agency Illegal Tobacco Task Force claims the state's flavored tobacco ban has created the need for harsher [criminal penalties](#) to deter the growing illicit market. The state also lost [$125 million](#) in revenue in the first year of the ban, according to the Tax Foundation.

Takeaway: To maximize the benefits to public health, legislators should refrain from policies that decrease interest in safer alternatives to cigarettes by restricting flavors.

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