

Flavoured tobacco ban and e-cigarette restrictions

This spring the Ontario government made important changes to laws governing tobacco industry products that will help our youth stay tobacco and nicotine free. Two of the most notable changes include a ban on flavoured tobacco and a ban on the sale of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) to anyone under 19.

People in Simcoe and Muskoka who have quit tobacco say breaking the addiction was the hardest thing they have ever done, usually taking multiple attempts. It's the addiction that the tobacco industry relies on for its sales. Flavouring hooks young new buyers by making the products more attractive to try and to continue using.

In 2014, a study from the University of Waterloo found that, among Canadian tobacco users in Grades 9 to 12, more than half reported using flavoured tobacco products. In particular, menthol cigarettes were the choice of 32 per cent of young cigarette smokers, compared to only 4.6 per cent of adult smokers. Alarming, 70 per cent of students using chew tobacco bought flavoured tobacco; 65 per cent smoked flavoured cigarillos; and 55 per cent used flavoured shisha in waterpipes and hookahs.

Flavoured tobacco products include everything from cigarettes and cigars to chew tobacco and e-juices for use in e-cigarettes. As a youth-oriented marketing approach, the flavouring ranges from candy, to fruits like mango, banana and orange, to coffee and even cocktails such as Piña Colada and Margarita. Another tobacco industry strategy to ease initiation of cigarette use by youth is menthol flavouring, which reduces the irritation caused by inhaling the chemical-laced smoke.

The e-alternative to nicotine addiction

The public health community welcomes efforts to counter the rapid uptake of e-cigarette use, especially among young people. The 2013 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey found that, of the roughly 2.5 million people who reported having tried an e-cigarette, one in five was between the ages of 15 and 24.

The provincial Electronic Cigarettes Act was designed to prevent a whole new generation of youth from becoming addicted to nicotine from e-cigarettes. Prior to this legislation, there had been no provincial restrictions on sales or marketing of these products. The tobacco industry has been promoting them with fervor reminiscent of the advertising for cigarettes back in the 1950s and '60s with celebrity endorsements, billboards and more.

To date the Health Canada law banning the sale of e-cigarettes and juices that contain nicotine has not been strongly enforced. As a result, people of all ages have had ready access to the highly addictive flavoured juices being sold everywhere from corner stores to flea markets and gas bars.

The ban on e-cigarette sales to anyone under 19 takes effect January 2016. Use of e-cigarettes will also be banned indoors and at other public places where smoking is prohibited. Research into the possible value of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid is ongoing.

By Dr. Lisa Simon