

Flavoured, non-cigarette tobacco for sale in the USA: an inventory analysis of Internet retailers

Tobacco companies flavour their products in order to recruit new, younger users.¹ Flavours like menthol, cherry, grape and chocolate mask the harshness of tobacco, making it easier to become addicted.² These flavours also appeal to young tobacco users. In Maryland, about four in five underage cigar smokers smoke flavoured cigars.³ Nationally, 57% of young adult (ages 18–24) cigar smokers smoke flavoured cigars.⁴ Since 2009, menthol and tobacco are the only flavours allowed in cigarettes.⁵ As of March 2013 the federal government does not restrict flavours in tobacco products other than cigarettes, though federal courts recently upheld flavoured tobacco sales bans enacted in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island.^{6,7}

To inform tobacco control efforts, we conducted this study of Internet tobacco retailers to describe the variety and flavours of tobacco products for sale in the USA. We identified a convenience sample of 18 Internet tobacco retailers, selected from the top search results for various kinds of tobacco products (eg, moist snuff, cigars). Data on dissolvable tobacco came from a list maintained by the Oregon Department

Table 1 Study sample of 8426 tobacco products for sale online in the USA

	Brands N	Products N	Any flavour %	Fruit %	Sweet %	Mint %	Liquor %	Menthol %	Other %
Total	849	8426	22.5	11.9	5.2	2.9	2.3	1.6	3.3
Chewing tobacco	71	163	35.0	17.2	17.2	3.7	3.1	0.6	4.3
Cigars	513	5385	9.5	4.5	4.0	0.3	1.0	1.3	1.0
Hand-rolled premium cigars	398	4628	3.3	0.8	1.3	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.7
Cigarette-sized cigars	64	325	52.3	31.4	19.7	0.9	3.1	18.5	4.9
Machine-made large cigars	61	432	43.8	23.8	20.1	0.5	3.9	1.4	1.6
Cigar wraps	6	91	81.3	63.7	8.8	0.0	11.0	0.0	4.4
Dissolvables	3	11	81.8	9.1	0.0	45.5	0.0	0.0	27.3
Dry snuff	58	577	44.4	16.1	8.5	6.8	4.3	5.4	13.0
Moist snuff	32	187	55.1	8.6	1.6	43.3	0.5	0.0	1.6
Pipe tobacco	167	1865	45.7	29.9	7.3	4.1	5.5	1.3	7.0
Traditional pipe tobacco	99	912	17.2	5.9	7.3	0.1	4.9	0.3	4.2
Dual purpose pipe tobacco	41	174	14.4	2.9	2.9	7.5	1.1	12.6	0.6
Shisha	28	779	86.1	63.9	8.2	8.1	7.2	0.0	11.7
Roll-your-own cigarette tobacco	16	66	15.2	13.6	1.5	0.0	0.0	13.6	0.0
Snus	30	81	33.3	3.7	1.2	27.2	1.2	0.0	0.0

of Justice,⁸ as these products could not be found for sale online.

We identified every tobacco product from each data source and classified products by type and flavour. 'Mint' included products with descriptors such as cool, fresh, ice, peppermint, spearmint and wintergreen. 'Fruit' included apple, apricot, cherry, grape and strawberry. 'Liquor' included margarita, rum, whisky and wine. 'Sweet' included bubble gum, candy, chocolate, honey, toffee and vanilla. 'Other' flavours include coffee, hickory and spice. Flavours like 'honey berry' were classified as both Fruit and Sweet. Both authors coded data, and resolved discrepancies by consensus. After removing duplicates, the final sample was 8426 unique non-cigarette tobacco products.

Of the tobacco products identified for this study, 1900 (23%) were flavoured (table 1). Apple, cherry, chocolate, honey, grape, menthol, mint, peach, rum, strawberry, sweet and vanilla were the most common flavours. Shisha (hookah tobacco) had the greatest number of flavours. Flavours were identified in over 80% of shisha, dissolvable tobacco and cigars wraps. Over 40% of the cigarette-sized cigars, machine-made cigars, moist snuff and dry snuff products identified were flavoured. Flavours were least common among hand-rolled premium cigars (3%). About one out of seven loose cigarette tobacco products were flavoured, whether sold as roll-your-own cigarette tobacco or 'dual purpose pipe tobacco', a designation that is used to avoid taxes.⁹

We found a large number of flavoured tobacco products for sale on the Internet. The convenience sample of Internet retailers limits generalisability but does not negate the finding that many flavoured tobacco products are available for online purchase. Though we identified many products others are surely missing from the study sample. If a full list of tobacco

products for sale was available from the Food and Drug Administration, this study could be replicated with more robust results. Applying the cigarette flavour ban to other tobacco products might reduce sales of these products and discourage youth initiation. Few hand-rolled premium cigars would be affected by a flavour ban.

What this paper adds

- ▶ This is the first study of Internet tobacco retailers to describe the variety and flavours of non-cigarette tobacco products for sale in the USA.
- ▶ Out of 8426 non-cigarette tobacco products identified, 1900 (23%) were flavoured; flavours were most common in hookah tobacco, dissolvables and cigar wraps. Flavours were least common among hand-rolled premium cigars.
- ▶ Applying the cigarette flavour ban to non-cigarette tobacco products might reduce sales of these products and discourage youth initiation. A flavour ban would have little effect on the premium cigar market.

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