

Cheap, Candy-Flavored Tobacco + No Tobacco Prevention = Ohio Kids in Jeopardy

Tobacco candy is the term some people are using to describe a new form of tobacco product that is mint-flavored and looks like a Tic Tac. RJ Reynolds, the manufacturer, calls it Camel Orbs, and it's being test marketed in Columbus, Ohio. The product is made of finely ground tobacco and contains nicotine, but looks like a mint and comes in a package that resembles a mint tin so closely that it's not difficult to imagine that kids could use it undetected in front of parents or teachers.

The Use of Non-Cigarette Forms of Tobacco on the Rise

Camel Orbs is just one of the many smokeless tobacco products that is contributing to the surge in use of non-cigarette forms of tobacco or "other tobacco products" (OTP) by adults and children here in Ohio and around the country. The table to the right shows how much the use of some OTP is increasing compared to the decline in cigarette smoking.

Recent studies have also found that hookah, an ancient Middle Eastern form of smoking involving a waterpipe, is being tried among high school and college students at rates similar to cigarette smoking. No studies of the new spit-free smokeless tobacco are available yet, but students are reporting their use by classmates, and janitors are finding packages in trash cans at schools.

<i>2002-2007 Sales*</i>
Small cigars: +116.9%
Large cigars: +5.2%
Snuff: +24%
Roll Your Own: +62.7%
Cigarettes: -13.1%

Non-Cigarette Tobacco Products: Candy-Flavored, Kid-Friendly and Cheap

As with Camel Orbs, other non-cigarette forms of tobacco are often candy-flavored and come in kid-friendly packaging. Spit/chew tobacco comes in grape, cherry, and sour apple; hookah tobacco comes in bubble gum and cotton candy; and little cigars are available in watermelon, chocolate, and peach. They are often sold and displayed in convenience stores near candy and snacks.

Not only are they often candy-flavored, but they're also cheap. When Ohio's cigarette tax was raised in 2003 and 2005, the legislature didn't raise the OTP tax. Therefore, the tax on OTP is less than half the cigarette tax. Since youth are sensitive to price, the lower tax makes OTP easier to buy. Small, flavored cigars sell for less than a dollar, sometimes for only a quarter.

Tobacco Prevention No Longer Funded in Ohio

These tempting products couldn't come at a worse time. As of July 1, 2010, the state will cancel all funding of tobacco prevention programs to help our children learn about the dangers of tobacco. It will also cancel all funding for tobacco cessation programs to help addicted tobacco users quit and even the funds to enforce the Smoke-Free Workplace Act.

Coalition Promotes Win-Win Solution

The Investing in Tobacco-Free Youth Coalition, made up of over 65 health organizations, businesses and other members, has started a campaign to reduce the use of OTP and fund important programs. The Coalition is asking the legislature to correct the inequality between the tobacco taxes so that all tobacco is taxed at the same rate. Doing so would generate approximately \$50 million a year for tobacco prevention and cessation programs. It would also decrease the overall consumption of other tobacco products by over 13%, and 25% fewer youth would use the products—a dramatic decline.

This level of funding for tobacco prevention and cessation is very reasonable. In fact, it is barely sufficient to combat the \$1.5 billion that the tobacco industry spends marketing its product in Ohio *every day*. The CDC actually recommends that Ohio spend \$145 million for tobacco prevention and cessation each year; this equalization would get us started toward that goal.

The increased funding would allow Ohio to fund high-quality, science based programs including in-school prevention programs; community tobacco prevention coalitions; assistance for minorities and other populations that are especially impacted by tobacco; youth outreach and counter marketing; cessation assistance; and enforcement of the SmokeFreeOhio law. In this tight economy, free or discounted cessation services are needed more than ever.

Tobacco Prevention Saves Money for the State and Every Taxpayer

Reducing smoking rates directly through the equalization and by bring back programs will reduce the budget and save healthcare costs and taxpayer dollars. Smoking costs Ohio over \$9 billion every year. Ohioans pay over \$4 billion in healthcare costs annually; \$1.4 billion of that amount is the portion covered by the state Medicaid program. The average Ohio household pays \$629 in state and federal taxes related to smoking-caused government expenditures every year.

Please contact your legislator to let them know that you support equalizing the tobacco taxes and dedicating the funds to tobacco prevention and cessation to keep our kids from becoming the next generation of Ohio smokers.

* Source: United States Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau