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## Teens and Flavored Cigars. Seriously?

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by: Barbara Greenberg

There's a new teen trend in Maryland and this one just may have you blowing smoke out of your ears. The good news is that the overall number of Maryland teens who smoke cigarettes has declined significantly during the past ten years. The bad news is that new statistics from a survey by the Maryland Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene [found](#) that cigar use among teens increased by more than 11% from 2000-2010. And the cigars are not the ones that your uncles smoked. The cigars of choice are -- get this -- *candy-flavored*.

Yes, selling tobacco products to minors remains illegal in Maryland, but in typical teen fashion, teens are able to find adults to purchase these cigars for them and as we all know, *not* all stores check IDs. In case you are wondering, the cigars are available in tempting flavors including chocolate, mango, strawberry, and peach. The flavors are no doubt intended to conceal the taste of the tobacco. Also, the cigars are sold individually for an amount that any teen allowance can handle, which is less than one dollar. And, honestly, you can rarely buy a candy bar for this price these days.

The saddest part of this situation is that teens are often unaware of the health risks associated with cigars. It certainly appears to be time to educate them that cigars may have more tobacco than cigarettes and may put them at risk for the same dreadful illnesses including cancer and emphysema. Apparently, Baltimore has taken this issue to court to ban the sale of these cigars. Attempts at the state and local level have been unsuccessful. And in 2009 the FDA banned the sale of flavored cigarettes nationally but not flavored cigars. As expected, the cigar association has remained mum on this issue.

Here we have yet another case of a wolf dressed in sheep's clothing. Sugarcoating cigars so that teens will buy them just doesn't sound sweet to me on any level. I hope that this burning issue is resolved soon.