

# CIGGIES TRAP KIDS IN A 'CANDIED' HAZE



Illustration  
• Amit Bandre

- On World No Tobacco Day, we look at products that are specifically targeted at children and young adults
- Young users believe that they are making a healthier choice by picking fruit or other 'friendly' flavours

## Express Features

**A** 16-year-old was showing signs of acute asthma and parents rushed him to a private hospital. On further probing they found that he has been taking flavoured tobacco products regularly, and after many hours of counselling he is now symptom-free.

Children often mistake fruit-flavoured tobacco products for a candy, and these products are easily available by the roadside. There is smokeless tobacco that could be mistaken for a harmless mint – and they could come as chews, dips or snuffs – and there are hookahs and electronic cigarettes that give out fumes that smell of honey and fruits.

These could attract even four-year-olds, according to a Harvard School of Public Health study, but most doctors in the city say that the most vulnerable here are adolescents even as young as 11 years old. Counsellor Dr Geetha Appachu says that a survey has recorded that "more than 25% of high school students, both boys and girls in classes between 8 and 12, have tried some kind of tobacco products."

Dr Ramprasad Attur, child psychiatrist with Tender Minds Clinic, says that packing is what attracts children to non-smokable products: "Most of them could be mistaken for a mouth-freshener... They also come in small sizes and they are easy to hide and cheap to buy." Attur says that a survey revealed that many are not asked for any age proof before selling them a tobacco product.

Geetha lists different products targeting children: "Apart from the common cigarettes, there are flavoured cigars, smokeless tobacco, hookah, pipes, electronic cigarettes and dissolvable tobacco to name a few." A 2010 study by Harvard School of Public Health said that dissolvable tobacco, which resembles candy, could result in poisoning among young children who would experience nausea and vomiting. The lead author of the study, Professor Gregory N Connolly, had commented that to a four-year-old the pellets look more like candy than cigarettes.

Dr Sunil Kumar K, a consultant - interventional pulmonology at Aster CMI hospital, says, "Flavoured chewable tobacco products are also on the rise and have known to cause a large number of oral and GI malignancies. Children often mistake it for a treat and the nicotine content causes addiction-perpetuating a behaviour similar to cigarette addiction."

Children mistake it for a healthy option, says Dr KS Satish, pulmonologist at Fortis Hospital. "Children start with an urge to try it once," he says. "These come in various flavours such as mango and cherry mixed with tobacco in bidis give them a high and makes them feel like they are having something healthy. Unlike cigarettes, cigars are longer and look attractive to children. They think their outing at a pub is incomplete without a hookah. Children have fallen victim to look, feel and taste such tobacco products."

**REALITY CHECK: TOBACCO SALES AROUND CITY SCHOOLS**  
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## BREAKING MYTHS

# ROLL YOUR OWN, BUT IT'S STILL A KILLER

## Ramzaava Chhakchhuak

**A** trend that is catching fire among smokers in city is the practice of rolling and smoking their own cigarettes. The reasons for ditching regular packaged cigarettes and resorting to 'roll-ups' or 'roll-ups' are varied. Many, however, are aware of its health implications.

Dr Vijay Agarwal, consultant, medical oncology HCG Enterprises Ltd, points out that rolled cigars are becoming popular and are preferred by you generation or people with low socio-economic profile as they are perceived to be cheaper, make them appear 'cool' and less harmful.

## Rollie Rationale

Take Sadananda Ramesh, a photographer – he started using hand-rolled cigarettes when a friend told that it was less harmful than regular cigarette was told that it was comparatively better, had fewer chemicals and harmful substances. For example, the paper used in regular cigarettes is quite harsh, however, with regular rolling paper it is not so harsh, "I heard," says Ramesh. He also searched the internet and claimed to have found articles about its less arduous nature.

Cost cutting is also another major reason for people using roll-ups. Imtiaz Ahmed, a systems engineer healthcare firm, was smoking at least five cigars a day. Six months back, he switched to roll-ups and says there has been a drastic decrease in his spending. "I would spend around ₹500 for a packet of tobacco, another 200 for filters and rolling paper. This one time purchase, would be enough for me for around 45 days. Plus I can roll cigarettes of any sizes to reduce the amount of tobacco," he says. Imtiaz would otherwise spend around ₹70 per day for his regular cigarettes. "It's ₹3000 for 45 days as against ₹700 with the roll-ups," he adds.

Others like Simran Chadda, a media professional, smoke rolled cigarettes just for its flavour. "I got a taste of rolled tobacco at a party at my friend's place last November. That's when I felt I tasted real tobacco and realized what I've been missing out on – taste of pure tobacco, with no added flavours or chemicals," says Simran who smokes rolled cigarettes socially.

## Equally, if not, More Harmful

Dr Amod Nayak, consultant and ophthalmologist at Dr Agarwal's Eye Hospital, says most have a misconception about that rollies are more 'natural', and a 'safer' option to regular cigarettes. "In factory-made cigarettes, the additives make up about half the weight of the dry weight of the tobacco. But in the rollies the additives are about 18 per cent of the dry weight. In other words, rollies have about 38 times more additives than factory-made," he says. He also highlights a Norwegian study done in 1996 among 26,000 smokers which showed that rollies were associated with higher risks of lung cancer. Other studies also consistently show a two-to-three times increased risk of cancer.

## Need Checks

Dr Sachin Kumar, senior consultant, pulmonology at Sakra World Hospital, says the practice is definitely more harmful as there is no quality control and youth would add and subtract anything they like according to their preference. "Rolled cigarettes should be completely avoided as this practice, which is only with rolling of cigarette, leads to adding of substances like marijuana and hashish that make them more addictive and dangerous," he adds.

