

MAKE AMERICA *Healthier*

THE PATH TO A HEALTHIER NATION

The Success of Smoking Cessation

THE ISSUE: Americans frequently hear about our bad habits and poor health. Yet we should also recognize and appreciate progress that's being made, including in reducing the use of cigarettes. Data shows that cigarette use in the U.S. has dropped significantly among youth and adults.

- The most recent [data](#) highlights a steady decline from the first Surgeon General's report in 1965, which showed just over 40% of adults used cigarettes.
- Today, only [11% of adults](#) use cigarettes.
- [National youth cigarette](#) use is even smaller at roughly 1% among middle school students and almost 2% of high school students.
- In 2024, only 3.5% of middle schoolers and nearly 8% of high schoolers [reported using](#) e-cigarettes.

The public and policymakers should be aware of the many efforts that contributed to this positive trend, including public education campaigns and the development of smoking cessation devices—such as electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches, patches, and gum—that helped cigarette smokers switch to safer alternatives.

THE CONCERNS: Misperceptions about the role of cessation devices and the relative harms of nicotine and nicotine delivery systems could undermine this progress.

Public policy leaders should be clear that smoking, vaping, and using other nicotine delivery systems carry risks for healthy individuals.

However, the public should also understand the relative risks of various nicotine devices. Importantly, nicotine itself, while addictive, **is not associated** with high risks of cancer. Cigarettes are harmful, causing cancer and emphysema, because of the tar and smoke that is inhaled due to the **burning** of tobacco.

Even doctors sometimes misunderstand the relative risks of these products. For example, two-thirds of doctors **incorrectly believe** or are unsure if nicotine causes cancer, which means they fail to appreciate the benefits of smoking cessation products. While it's important for physicians and the public to be aware of e-cigarettes' own health risks, **dubious studies** with limited data exaggerate risks and ignore the harm reduction benefits, potentially leading to worse outcomes.

Further, the FDA restricts adult access to effective cessation tools, potentially driving users to black markets or back to cigarettes. For example, policymakers say they want to ban vape flavors to reduce teen vaping. And yet:

- In 2021, **only 13.7% of youth vaped due to flavors**, while 43.4% cited stress or anxiety.
- FDA policies disproportionately target the flavors adults prefer.

THE RISKS:

Restrictive policies, including the FDA's **flavor bans**, may be intended to discourage young Americans from illegally using cessation products, but they have also led to **thriving illicit e-cigarette markets**. Black markets create law enforcement challenges and the risk of injury due to the use of unregulated products. Some consumers return to smoking when their preferred cessation product is no longer

available. Claims that flavor bands only impact young users ignore studies like this [2018 survey](#) of 70,000 adult e-cigarette users, which found that fruit and dessert flavors were most popular, not tobacco flavors.

SOLUTIONS: The FDA must do better. The public needs and deserves clear guidance and a thorough understanding of the risks of smoking and other nicotine delivery products. It's not just the public, but a survey showed [doctors want clearer FDA guidance](#) on smoke-free products, indicating a need for training to correct misconceptions and promote cessation tools. Many of these doctors expressed interest in sharing this information with patients.

To make America healthier, the FDA should:

- Approve cessation aids and prioritize harm reduction for adults while enforcing age restrictions to prevent youth access.
- Implement state-level pilot programs to test balanced regulations that maintain adult access to flavored e-cigarettes while monitoring youth usage trends.
- Launch campaigns, like [those in the UK](#), to educate healthcare providers not only on the low risk of adult use of nicotine, but on how non-combustible nicotine delivery systems can help adult smokers to switch to safer alternatives.

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SOURCES:

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