

## The Harmful Effects of Tobacco Products: Not a Safe Option to Cigarettes

### What are tobacco products?

When people think of tobacco products, they usually think of cigarettes. However, there are many forms of tobacco sold in Canada, including:

- Spit tobacco or smokeless tobacco;
- Cigars, cigarillos, and pipe tobacco;
- Bidis; and
- Kreteks or clove and other herbal cigarettes.

### Are other tobacco products safer than cigarettes?

Tobacco products other than cigarettes are as dangerous as regular cigarettes. However, many people use these products because they think they are safer than cigarettes. Most of these products have many of the same toxic chemicals as cigarettes. These can be just as addictive and harmful to a person's health.

### Spit tobacco

Spit tobacco, also known as smokeless tobacco, is tobacco that is placed inside the mouth. It is sold as:

- *Chew* – This is a leafy form of tobacco sold in pouches. A person keeps the chew between the cheek and gums for several hours at a time. It is also known as 'a wad'.
- *Plug* – This is chew tobacco that has been pressed into a hard block and placed between the cheek and gum.
- *Snuff* – This is ground-up moist tobacco sold in cans. It is usually placed between the bottom lip and gum. It is also known as 'dipping'.

Spit tobacco can be as addictive as smoking cigarettes. A person who uses 8 to 10 dips or

chews a day gets the same amount of nicotine as a person who smokes 30 to 40 cigarettes a day. Spit tobacco is flavoured with licorice, mint or cherry and sweetened with sugar. However, spit tobacco has over 3000 chemicals including 28 known cancer-causing chemicals, such as formaldehyde and cadmium.

People who use spit tobacco are at higher risk of:

- Mouth cancer, including cancers of the lip, tongue and cheeks;
- Cancers of the throat, sinus, and stomach;
- Heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure; and
- Dental diseases, including receding gums, tooth decay, stained teeth, and chronic bad breath.

Cancers of the mouth can develop within five years of regular tobacco product use. Only 56 per cent of people with mouth or throat cancer live more than five years after the time of diagnosis.

### Cigars, cigarillos, and pipe tobacco

Cigar smoking is a trend among youth due to marketing efforts that portray cigars as glamorous and less dangerous than cigarettes. Cigarillos, or small cigars, are also popular among youth. These can cost less than cigars and come in a variety of flavours such as strawberry, peach and watermelon. Cigar smokers may spend up to an hour smoking a large cigar that can have as much tobacco as a full pack of cigarettes.

People who smoke cigars are at higher risk of heart disease and conditions that make it harder to breathe, particularly for those who inhale and who smoke several cigars per day.

People who smoke cigars and pipes face a higher risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, as well as lung cancer.

## **Bidis**

Bidis, or beadies, are thin cigarettes of tobacco wrapped in leaves and tied with colourful strings. Bidis are popular with youth because they are cheaper than regular cigarettes and are sold in a variety of candy-like flavours such as chocolate, cherry and mango. Because bidis are wrapped in a leaf rather than paper, youth may believe they are a safe, "natural" option to cigarettes.

While bidis have less tobacco than regular cigarettes, they are unfiltered and can have higher levels of nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide. Bidis do not stay lit easily, so people who smoke them need to puff harder and inhale deeper into their lungs to keep them lit.

People who smoke bidis are at higher risk of heart disease and cancers of the mouth, lung, stomach and throat. They are also four times more likely to suffer from chronic lung infections.

## **Kreteks**

Kreteks are Indonesian cigarettes made up of tobacco, ground cloves and other additives. Teens believe that Kreteks are safer than regular cigarettes because they are often marketed as "natural tobacco". This is misleading because "natural tobacco" can be as dangerous as regular cigarettes.

Kreteks have the same health risks as regular cigarettes, but they have more nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide. People who smoke Kreteks are at higher risk of acute lung injury and have up to 20 times the risk of problems with lung function.

## **Are these products just a fad and who is using them?**

"Natural tobacco" is a new trend among youth. The products are often used by youth and marketed as more natural and safer than regular

cigarettes. Flavoured cigarettes and other forms of tobacco are popular among youth. These can be cheaper than regular cigarettes and may come in candy-like flavours that appeal to youth who might not otherwise start smoking.

While more studies are needed on alternate tobacco use in BC, tobacco control workers and health care providers are aware of an increase in the number of youth who are trying these products.

## **For more information:**

For more information visit the following Web sites:

[www.tobaccofacts.org](http://www.tobaccofacts.org)

[www.cdc.gov/tobacco/spit.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/spit.htm)

[www.nstep.org](http://www.nstep.org)

If you would like to quit smoking, call the toll-free *Quitnow* helpline at 1-877-455-2233 or visit [www.quitnow.ca](http://www.quitnow.ca).

**For more BC HealthFile topics visit**  
[www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm),  
or visit your local public health unit.

**Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:**

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

**Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at**  
[www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)