

Candy Flavored Cigarettes Gain Popularity

Attorneys General from all 50 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands are urging federal officials and Congressional representatives to take action to stop the importation of hand-rolled flavored cigarettes produced primarily in India.

The cigarettes, called “bidis,” are flavored to taste like strawberry, chocolate, mandarin orange, vanilla, grape, lemon-lime, clove, mint, cinnamon, wild cherry, mango, cardamon, licorice, or raspberry. They are hand rolled into the leaves of an Indian plant, tied with string and attractively and exotically packaged. All in all, it looks like a product that was designed for teens. But these tobacco cigarettes are addictive, dangerous, and rapidly gaining in popularity.

They have been around for years, but now research shows the fad is growing. Nationwide more than 13% of high school kids have tried bidis. Though kids may think they’re safe, tests show the bidis are full of potentially toxic additives. And they have even more carbon monoxide, tar, and nicotine than American cigarettes – so much nicotine that some kids say they give them a brief high.

In India, bidis have been considered a poor person’s cigarette for many years, but with severe consequences. Studies in India find that the lung cancer risk among bidi smokers are higher than people smoking Western style cigarettes.

According to one India based manufacturer, “Bidi Cigarettes are now being exported to more than 122 countries. More than 700 trillion bidi cigarettes are smoked annually, with the numbers increasing phenomenally every year.”

Bidis are puffed more frequently than regular cigarettes to prevent them from going out. Inhaling a bidi cigarette requires great pulmonary effort due to its shape and poor combustibility. Consequently, bidi smokers breathe in greater quantities of tar and other toxins than smokers of regular cigarettes. In addition, bidis contain more than three times the amount of nicotine and more than five times the amount of tar than regular cigarette smoke.

Studies have found that bidi smokers have two times the risk of lung cancer than those who smoke Indian filtered cigarettes, have five times the risk of suffering heart disease as non-smokers, are more at risk for cancers of the throat, oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, lungs, esophagus, stomach, and liver than regular smokers.

Bidis are readily available at most smoke shops, gas stations, liquor stores, ethnic food stores, and selected health stores. They can also be purchased through the Internet and recent sting operations by numerous state Attorneys General offices indicated most on-line sellers did nothing to verify the ages of the undercover minors before selling them the cigarettes. The children and youth who participated in the undercover buys ranged in age from nine to seventeen years. A nine year-old child successfully purchased bidis over the telephone using a toll-free number provided by a web site. In another instance, a minor who purchased bidis from the same seller received free sample packs of mango, grape, and lemon-lime bidis with her order. ☺