

## ***Youth Report Widespread Use of Cigars Yet Lack Specific Knowledge of the Health Risks***

According to the first national survey of cigar use among high school students, 22% of students were current cigar users in 1997 (see CESAR FAX, Volume 8, Issue 14). To better understand the nature and extent of teen cigar use, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health, recently conducted a series of 18 focus groups with youths ages 11-19. The focus group participants included 230 cigar users and nonusers from schools in 10 major metropolitan areas across all regions of the country. Following are some of the findings of the focus groups:

- *“Teens from [the] focus groups report widespread cigar use and experimentation among their peers” (p. 4).* Thirty-five percent of teens reported that half or more of their peers had smoked a cigar in the past 30 days, and 40% reported increased use among their peers since the previous year. Over half (54%) of the teens reported that they had personally smoked a cigar in their lifetime.
- *“Manufactured cigars, rather than premium cigars, are most commonly used by teens due to their ease of purchase, low cost, sweetened flavors, and pleasant aromas” (p. 7).* Specific brands mentioned as being popular were *Swisher Sweets*, *Black and Mild*, and *Phillie Blunts*.
- *“Teens in [the] focus groups report their peers use cigars as blunts for smoking marijuana” (p. 9).* Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the teens knew people about their age who used cigars as blunts for smoking marijuana, typically in a party environment.
- *“Smoking cigars is more socially acceptable among teens and adults than smoking cigarettes or using spit tobacco” (p. 16).* Over half (55%) of the teens in the focus groups reported having been with adults who have allowed teens to smoke cigars.
- *“Though teens in [the] focus groups appear to be generally aware of the adverse effects of tobacco use, they tend to lack specific knowledge of the health risks of cigars” (p. 19).* Teens appeared to draw general conclusions about cigar-related health risks from information learned about other forms of tobacco use.

The authors recommend that the Department of Health and Human Services “develop an action plan to address the public health risks posed by cigars, particularly access by youth,” including “an initiative to inform the public through a public awareness and educational effort appropriate for cigars” (p. 24). A copy of the report is available online at [www.dhhs.gov/progorg/oei](http://www.dhhs.gov/progorg/oei) or by calling 800-848-8960.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, *Youth Use of Cigars: Patterns of Use and Perceptions of Risk*, February 1999.

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