



Debunking the WHO's Flavour Ban Proposal

On World No Tobacco Day 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) renewed its [call for countries to ban flavours](#) in all tobacco and nicotine products, including vaping and nicotine pouches. The stated goal is to reduce the appeal of these products, particularly to young people. If outright bans are not possible, the WHO also suggests strict regulation of flavouring agents and packaging.

The WHO's Arguments vs. The Facts

1. Flavours Increase Attractiveness and Youth Uptake

WHO claim: Flavours make nicotine products more appealing, especially to children and young people, leading to experimentation and sustained use.

Fact: Flavours are not just for young people. Different studies show flavours are [commonly used among regular vapers of all age groups](#). In the United States and Canada, it is estimated that around [two thirds of adult vapers use flavours](#). In Europe, the latest [Eurobarometer on the Attitudes of Europeans towards tobacco and electronic cigarettes](#) shows that, among those who vape at least on a monthly basis, almost half (48%) use fruity flavours, and 20% use candy flavours. Another recent [study](#) found that "only 2.1% reported tobacco as the single most often used" flavour.

The [difference in flavour use between age groups](#) is minor, and studies show that flavours are not a driver of youth smoking initiation. In fact, a 2020 study found that vaping [flavours was not associated with increased youth smoking](#) but were linked to higher adult smoking cessation rates.

2. Flavours Impede Quitting

WHO claim: Flavours make it harder for users to quit nicotine products.

Fact: The opposite is true. Flavours are essential for adult smokers trying to quit. By distancing the taste from tobacco, flavours help smokers switch and stay away from cigarettes. According to Yale School of Public Health, flavoured vaping devices increase the odds of adult [smoking cessation by 230%](#). Multiple studies confirm that adults who use flavoured e-cigarettes are more likely to quit smoking than those who use tobacco-flavoured or unflavoured products. Banning flavours would undermine these public health gains.

When banned, the University of Waterloo found that [5 out of 10 vapers would turn to illegal sources to buy flavoured devices or would go back to smoking cigarettes](#). Flavour bans run the risk of increasing tobacco consumption and cancer incidence by limiting smoking cessation and forcing vapers back to smoking cigarettes.

3. Flavours Are Unsafe

WHO claim: Flavours have not been shown to be safe when inhaled and may have toxic effects.

Fact: According to the EU's own Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks ([SCHEER](#)), "there is no specific data that specific flavourings used in the EU pose health risks for electronic cigarette users following repeated exposure." The real risk comes from unregulated, illicit products and cigarettes, precisely what bans encourage.

4. Flavours Drive a Youth Vaping Epidemic

WHO claim: Flavours are responsible for youth vaping.

Fact: There is no evidence that flavours are the cause of youth vaping or smoking. Multiple studies show that [social](#), [economic](#), and [environmental](#) factors—such as parental smoking, peer influence, and socioeconomic status—are far more significant. Most young people who vape have already tried smoking, and regular vaping among never-smokers remains very rare. In countries with rising vaping, youth smoking rates are at record lows. A [review of fifteen studies](#) published in 2019 stated that "a true gateway effect in youths has not yet been demonstrated." An in-depth analysis can be found [here](#).

5. Flavour Bans Will Improve Public Health

WHO claim: Banning flavours will reduce youth uptake and improve public health.

Fact: Evidence from around the world shows that prohibition does not work. Flavour bans push consumers to the black market or back to smoking. After [San Francisco's](#) flavour ban, youth smoking rates increased for the first time in decades. In [Estonia](#), 60% of vapers continued to use flavours by mixing their own or buying illicit products. In [Massachusetts](#), cigarette sales rose after a flavour ban. Such policies undermine harm reduction and increase health risks.

The Importance of Flavours for Harm Reduction

Flavours are not a marketing ploy for children—they are a vital tool for adult smokers to quit and stay off cigarettes. Removing flavours would:

- Push many vapers back to smoking, increasing cancer and disease rates.
- Drive consumers to unregulated black markets, increasing health risks.
- Undermine the legal market for nicotine products, sabotaging public health goals.
- Fail to address the real causes of youth risk behaviour, which are rooted in social and economic factors.



Policy Recommendations

- Reject blanket flavour bans. Instead, focus on strict age verification, responsible marketing, and targeted enforcement against underage sales.
- Allow adult smokers access to flavoured alternatives to support smoking cessation.
- Provide accurate, risk-based information about the relative risks of nicotine products, including on packaging.
- Address youth risk behaviour through broader social policies, not product prohibition.

Conclusion

Flavour bans are a simplistic solution to a complex problem. They risk reversing hard-won gains in tobacco harm reduction and public health. Policymakers should focus on evidence-based regulation that protects youth while supporting adults to quit smoking for good.

For further resources and evidence, see:

<https://worldvapersalliance.com/harm-reduction-vaping-fact-sheet/>

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