FDA Cracks Down on E-Cigarettes and Other Alternative Tobacco Products

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently hit the tobacco industry with bad news that's simultaneously good news for young people's health. According to new rules under the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, the federal government's strict regulatory authority over tobacco products now extends beyond traditional cigarettes to include the electronic kind, cigars, cigarillos, pipe tobacco and hookah tobacco, the Huffington Post reports.

The decision to control these alternatives to regular cigarettes follows a massive increase in the number of young people in the United States smoking flavored products. According to recent findings from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of American teens smoking e-cigarettes tripled between 2013 and 2014, and their use of hookahs roughly doubled. In addition, federal health surveys show that seven out of 10 middle and high school students who use tobacco today are using a flavored product.

Under the new rules, makers of smoking alternatives will have to register with the FDA, disclose what's in their products and get approval to send them to market. The changes will also put a halt to misleading terms such as "light," "low" or "mild" on e-cigarette and cigar packaging, ban all free samples and prohibit sales of any smoking products to anyone under 18, both online and in person.

"There's no telling how many adolescents lit up for the first time in the two years since the FDA first considered these changes or how many of those got hooked on this deadly addiction," said advocates at the American Heart Association. "Still, it's comforting to know that we're headed in the right direction now."

But advocates warned there's more work to be done to help prevent dangerous new smoking products from getting into teens' hands. Future proposals include banning candy and fruit flavors for all tobacco products, requiring child-resistant packaging on cigar and liquid nicotine packages and banning manufacturers from designing kid-friendly advertising campaigns.

For more information about the health risks of e-cigarettes, click here.

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