

Flavour accessories in tobacco products enhance attractiveness and appeal

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Key messages:

- **Flavours attract youth:** Flavoured tobacco products are especially appealing to children and adolescents, contributing to initiation of tobacco and nicotine use.
- **Circumvention through accessories:** Tobacco companies and retailers circumvent bans on flavours with “flavour accessories” that add flavour to otherwise unflavoured tobacco products.
- **Targeting youth:** Many flavour accessory websites feature youth-oriented marketing, and the majority do not require age verification.
- **Policy gaps:** As accessories often do not contain nicotine or tobacco, they are frequently unregulated, even though they are intended for use with tobacco products.
- **Global regulation:** Some countries have implemented flavour bans or restrictions to prevent uptake by youth.
- **Countries should consider:**
 - restricting or prohibiting flavour accessories; and
 - where flavour accessories are permitted, their marketing, promotion and points of sales should be strictly regulated to support tobacco control and to ensure the highest level of public health protection.

Flavours increase the appeal of tobacco products and contribute to initiation of tobacco product use, particularly among children and adolescents. For many young users, flavours are one of the key motivations for using nicotine products, such as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), and tobacco products. Recognizing that flavours can increase the palatability of tobacco products, the Partial Guidelines for Implementation of Articles 9 and 10 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (1) recommend that Parties prohibit or restrict ingredients that enhance the palatability of tobacco products. Therefore, in some jurisdictions, the presence of flavours in nicotine and/or tobacco products has been restricted or prohibited to prevent youth uptake.

The impact of flavour regulations, including on menthol, has, however, been undermined by market-driven innovations. In response to regulatory measures, new products have emerged that enable consumers to add flavours to otherwise unflavoured tobacco products. Examples include “flavour accessories” – products that do not contain nicotine or tobacco and cannot be used on their own but are specifically designed to add flavour to tobacco products. The accessories include items such as flavour sprays, cards, capsules and filter tips. They can be considered a means to circumvent the intent of flavour bans, as they allow users to experience flavoured tobacco products even when the products themselves comply with flavour regulations. As such accessories are usually sold separately and do not contain tobacco or nicotine, they fall outside the scope of tobacco control legislation.

To strengthen understanding of the availability of flavour accessories and how they are marketed to circumvent legislation, WHO initiated a project to examine the availability and marketing of these products in eight global markets, in Brazil, India, Italy, Singapore,

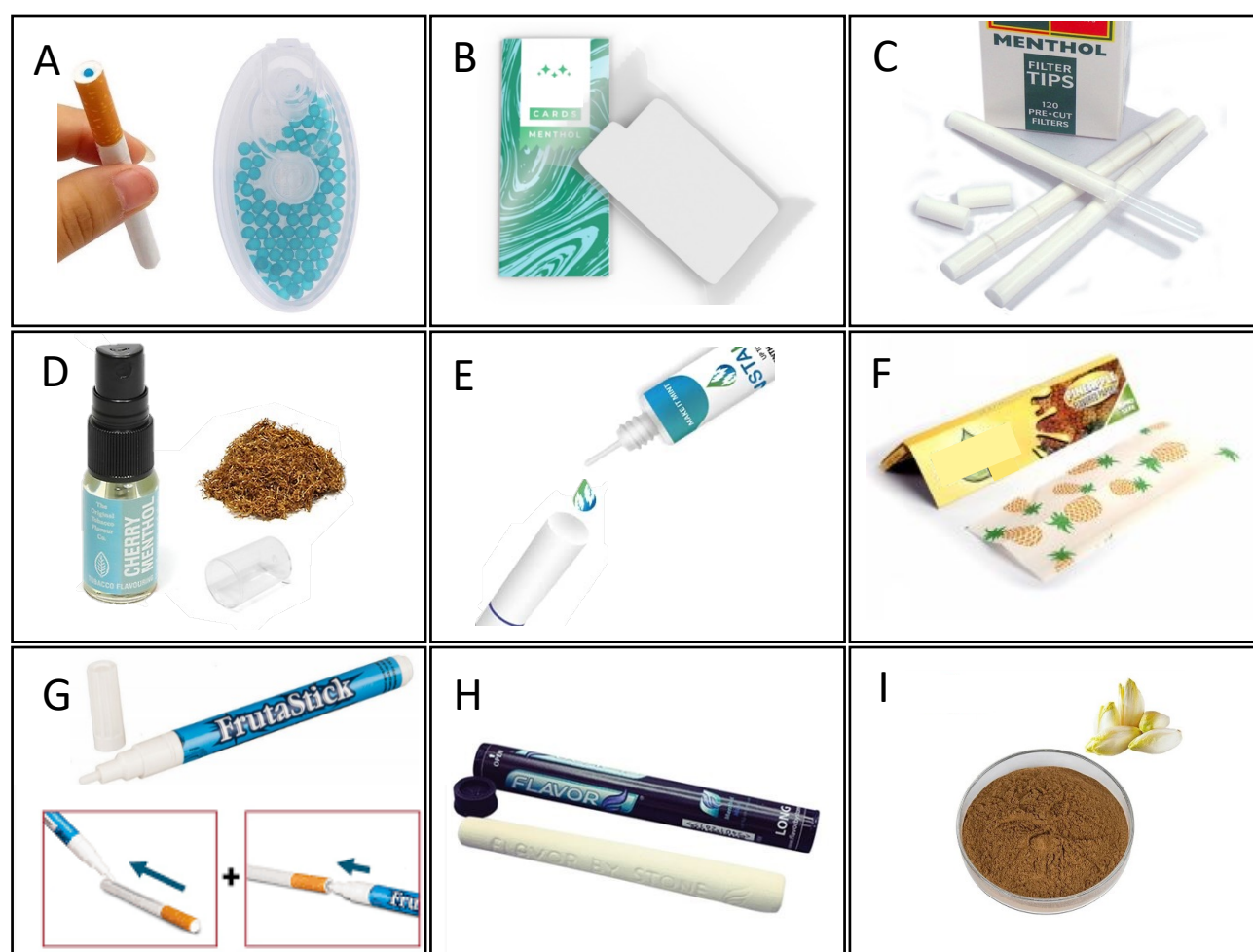
South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) and the United States of America (USA). Data previously collected from Netherlands (Kingdom of the) on these accessories were also analysed.

Types of flavour accessories

A wide variety of flavouring accessories was reported, including capsules, cards, filter tips and tubes for make-your-own cigarettes, drops, sprays, rolling

paper, aroma markers, a flavour stone and a powder (see Fig. 1). The first three categories were the most frequently reported.

Fig. 1. Types of flavour accessories identified on the Internet. Some are designed to flavour individual products (A, C, E, F, G), whereas others are designed to flavour a product batch (B, D, H, I).



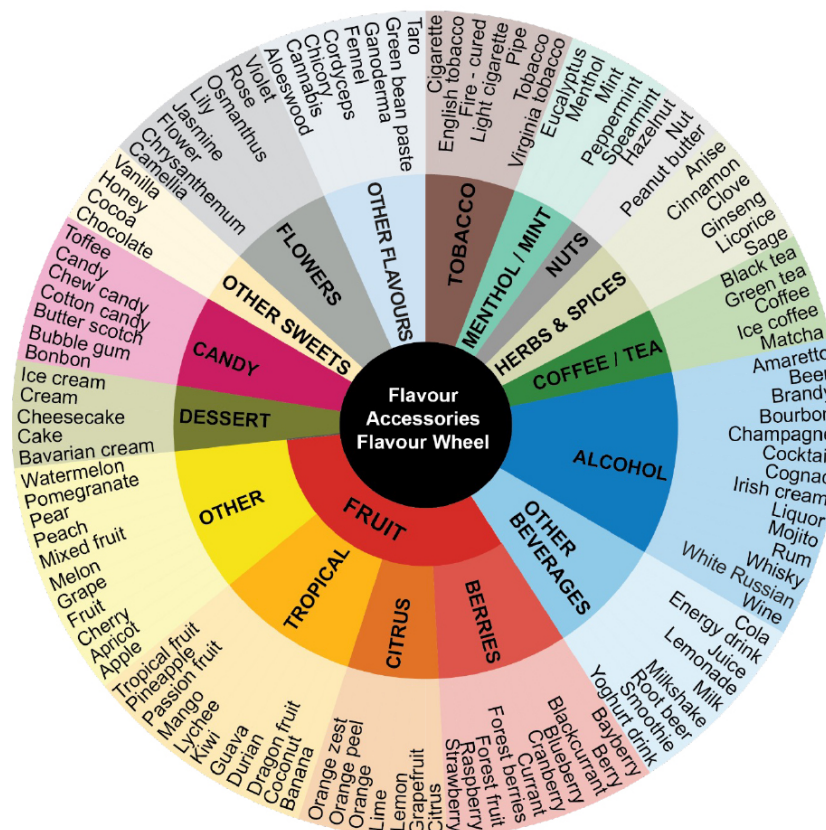
- A. Click capsules, beads or balls: Beads measuring a few millimetres are pressed into the filter of a cigarette to make a flavour capsule cigarette or into loose filters for roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco that contain a capsule (2)
- B. Card: Card of a similar size to a cigarette pack that can be inserted into a pack (3)
- C. Filter tip: Flavoured filter tip that can be used on a RYO cigarette or included in a filter tube used in a “make-your-own” cigarette (4)
- D. Spray: Liquid applied by spraying onto loose tobacco (5)
- E. Drops: Liquid that can be dripped onto a cigarette filter from a tube or bottle (6)
- F. Filter tube or rolling paper: paper tube used for making a cigarette or rolling paper used for making a RYO cigarette (7)
- G. Marker: Flavoured marker used to draw a line along the side of a cigarette or to press into the end of the filter (8)
- H. Stone or stick: A porous stone-like stick, shaped like a cigarette, that can be inserted into a cigarette pack (9)
- I. Powder: A powder that can be added to loose tobacco (10)

Flavours

Flavouring accessories are available in many different flavours, as illustrated in the “flavour wheel” in Fig. 2. In total, 120 unique flavours were reported, most of which were fruity, sweet, alcoholic or minty. Eight flavours

were classified as “other flavours”, as they could not be grouped into one of the 13 main categories. These include plant-based flavours such as chicory and fennel, as well as fungus flavours such as of *Cordyceps* and *Ganoderma*.

Fig. 2. The 120 unique flavours found in flavour accessories (outer ring) classified into 13 main categories (inner ring)



The availability of flavours in accessories differs among countries (Table 1). Menthol/mint and fruit flavours were reported in all countries, while nuts and/or dessert flavours

were reported only in Brazil, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and the USA and tobacco flavours were reported only in Brazil, India, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and the USA.

Table 1. Availability of flavours accessories in nine countries

	Brazil	India	Italy	Singapore	South Africa	Switzerland	United Kingdom	USA	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
Tobacco	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Menthol/mint	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit-citrus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit-berries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit-tropical	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit-other	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dessert	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Candy	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other sweet	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Herbs & spices	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Coffee/tea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Alcohol	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Other beverages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Nuts	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Flowers	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓

Coloured bars represent the number of times flavours in each of the main categories of the flavour wheel were reported, per country. The longer the bar, the more frequently the type of flavour was reported.

Marketing strategies

Smokers – particularly smokers of menthol cigarettes – were identified as target groups for nearly two thirds of the products on Internet shops. Many of the websites appeared to be particularly attractive to youth due to their use of colours and images, professional, sleek designs, social media links and the wide range of flavours and products on offer. Although the websites promoted items intended for use with tobacco products, the majority (54%) did not require any form of age verification.

Summary and regulatory considerations

The wide availability and variety of flavouring accessories is a concern. While it is not clear whether their availability and use directly increase tobacco consumption or initiation of tobacco users by young people and non-tobacco users or whether they hinder attempts at cessation, it is evident that flavour accessories increase the appeal of tobacco products and facilitate access to flavoured products.

Thus, policymakers are encouraged to consider regulatory measures to restrict or prohibit the sale of flavour accessories. Where these products are permitted, their marketing, promotion and points of sales should be strictly regulated to support tobacco control and to ensure the highest level of public health protection.

Several countries, including Belgium (11), Denmark (12) and Lithuania (13), have introduced national regulations on flavour accessories, mainly in tobacco-based products. These examples, which represent different regulatory approaches, could serve as useful models for other governments.

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Methods

The Information Sheet ‘Flavour accessories in tobacco products enhance attractiveness and appeal’ was developed by the World Health Organization, in collaboration with subject matter experts from the Center for Health Protection, Center for Public Health, Healthcare and Society, Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM). WHO and RIVM conceptualized the scope of the project, which informed the development of the peer-reviewed article in the Journal Tobacco Control, entitled ‘Across the world availability of flavour accessories for tobacco products’, available at <https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2024/04/05/tc-2023-058255>. A detailed methodology for the peer-reviewed article is provided in the published article. The summary of the Article was developed into an Information Sheet, based on requests of WHO member states to simplify the science and make the information more accessible, allowing for wider dissemination and visibility.

In addition, an extensive search of the recommendations contained in the reports of the WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation (Study Group), as well as the reports of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its Implementing Guidelines, including the Partial Guidelines on Articles 9 and 10 of the WHO FCTC, was conducted. The extensive evidence available in the literature was reviewed by the Study Group and is well documented in its technical report series. This serves as the basis of the Study Group’s subsequent recommendations, as well as the basis for the Information Sheet. The recommendations within the Information Sheet align with the main recommendations of the Study Group’s report to the 157th session of the WHO Executive Board, which can be found at https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB157/B157_14-en.pdf.

Summary of evidence

The evidence gathered indicates that flavour accessories — such as flavour cards, capsules, or drops — enhance the appeal of tobacco and nicotine products by allowing customization and masking harshness. It also shows that flavour accessories are often used to undermine flavour bans and sustain youth interest and initiation. Prohibiting or regulating their sale and marketing can play a key role in preventing circumvention of relevant laws on flavours and in protecting public health.

Contributors

The Information Sheet was conceptualized by WHO, in consultation with subject matter experts on flavour accessories and flavouring agents. Dr Anne Havermans, Centre for

Health Protection, National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Dr Reinskje Talhout, Centre for Health Protection, National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), Netherlands (Kingdom of the) collaborated closely with WHO in the content development of the Information Sheet. All contributors, including the WHO FCTC Convention Secretariat, provided critical comments and approved the final version of the Information Sheet.

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The Information Sheet was additionally reviewed extensively by WHO colleagues across Headquarters, including the Department of Communications, and the regional offices, to ensure wider applicability.

Country informants from the nine participating countries — Brazil, India, Italy, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) and the United States of America (USA) — contributed to the evidence gathered for the published article in Tobacco Control.

Potential conflicts of interest

All contributors, including experts and reviewers, were required to complete declarations of interests’ forms, which were evaluated by the WHO Technical Unit (the No Tobacco Unit of the Health Promotion Department), and treated in line with WHO guidance.

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