

Flavoured capsule cigarettes pose a threat to smokefree goals

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New research from ASPIRE2025, a University of Otago research theme, challenges tobacco companies' claims they are working towards a smokefree world and suggests young people are vulnerable to tobacco companies' product innovations.

The research, published recently in the leading international journal *Tobacco Control*, examined young adults' responses to flavour capsule [cigarettes](#). When crushed, these capsules add a flavour (typically fruit or menthol) to the cigarette smoke inhaled; this type of cigarette allows users to customise their smoking experience and reduce the harshness of smoking.

Lead researcher, Professor Janet Hoek of the Departments of Public Health and Marketing, says the findings suggest susceptible [non-smokers](#) see flavour capsules as more appealing, and they are more likely to experiment with these than with unflavoured cigarettes.

"Tobacco companies have recently made much of their desire to promote a smokefree world.

However, these claims are inconsistent with their product innovations, which make smoked [tobacco](#) products more appealing to non-smoking [young people](#)."

In the study of 425 smokers and 390 susceptible non-smokers, smokers preferred unflavoured cigarettes to the capsule flavours tested while susceptible non-smokers showed the reverse pattern and preferred the flavoured capsule cigarettes to the unflavoured option. Susceptible non-smokers were more than three times as likely to choose a "fruit burst" or "pineapple and mango" flavour than an unflavoured cigarette.

As well as using a choice experiment, the researchers also examined scenarios, where smokers and susceptible non-smokers indicated how likely they would be to accept different cigarettes offered to them.

"Smokers were more likely to take an unflavoured cigarette offered to them than a flavoured capsule cigarette, while susceptible non-smokers were more likely to take a flavoured capsule option than an unflavoured cigarette," Professor Hoek explains.

"Susceptible non-smokers were significantly more likely than daily smokers to view flavoured [capsule](#) cigarettes as smoother, more fun to smoke, more attractive and more stylish," she says.

"Because most smokers give taste as the main reason why they smoke a particular brand, it is logical that they are not interested in new products that will change that taste. By contrast, susceptible non-smokers are likely to prefer a product that makes smoking a more palatable experience."

Professor Hoek says the findings show how important it is to continue monitoring [tobacco companies'](#) marketing strategies.

"Evidence that flavour capsules are more appealing

to non-smokers than to smokers suggests policy makers need to be vigilant and ensure [product innovations](#) cannot undermine smokefree goals."

More information: Janet Hoek et al, Young adult susceptible non-smokers' and smokers' responses to capsule cigarettes, *Tobacco Control* (2018). DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054470

Provided by University of Otago

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