

Nicotine Pouches on the Rise

Warm-up question: What are your thoughts on these newer products, like e-cigarettes or nicotine pouches?

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The tobacco industry is evolving quickly. New data yesterday from the Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show e-cigarette use among middle and high schoolers on a continued rapid decline. But **regulators** remain on high alert as sales of new products like oral nicotine pouches increase. NPR's Yuki Noguchi reports.

YUKI NOGUCHI, BYLINE: Regulators credited their **crackdown** on e-cigarettes with reducing teen vaping. Half a million fewer teens used e-cigarettes in the past year, according to the National Youth Tobacco Survey. More than a quarter of teens vaped just five years ago. Today, that rate is just below 6%. But if there's anything anti-tobacco **advocates** learned from the sudden surge in youth e-cigarette use about a decade ago, it's that new products can come out of nowhere and addict a generation seemingly overnight. Brian King, the director of the FDA Center for Tobacco Products, cited a new one of potential concern - nicotine pouches. While the number of young people using them didn't increase significantly last year, it's been **on an uptick**.

BRIAN KING: Our **guard is up**. We're aware of the reported growing sales trends for nicotine pouches, and we're closely monitoring the evolving tobacco product landscape for threats to public health, particularly when it comes to kids.

NOGUCHI: Pouches, like most modern tobacco products, no longer look or smell like the leafy, smoky tobacco of the past. Meghan Morean says the ones she bought in a Danish airport this summer look and smell like chewing gum.

MEGHAN MOREAN: They're, like, little, tiny pillows made of, like, this soft, fibrous material. The little pouches contain nicotine, salt and flavoring.

NOGUCHI: Morean, a tobacco and addiction research scientist at Yale, says they're **undetectable**. People can rest them between their gum and cheek, and they can be used where smoking or vaping isn't allowed - airlines, classrooms, offices. She says for

many years, pouches were regarded as obscure, **niche** cousins of chewing tobacco, more unsavory than cool.

MOREAN: Pouches really hadn't been sort of, like, out and about in this public-facing way. They kind of were just, like, behind the counter at gas stations and stuff.

NOGUCHI: That changed as tobacco companies invested in pouches, and they gained a social media fan base, including from celebrities like Joe Rogan and Tucker Carlson. Of course, one big critical question is whether nicotine pouches might help people stop smoking. The FDA's Brian King says more research is needed.

KING: That's why it's critical to have additional data from actual population groups to help identify who is using it.

NOGUCHI: But Yolonda Richardson, CEO of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, says the industry's own marketing **betrays their intent**. They emphasize fun, flavor and **discretion**.

YOLONDA RICHARDSON: We're very concerned that the industry continues to find new products, new ways to addict our kids and increasingly to do so in ways that become really **inconspicuous** to adults.

NOGUCHI: Megan Moran, a public health messaging expert at Johns Hopkins University, agrees.

MEGAN MORAN: When we think of these pouches as tobacco products, it kind of makes them, I think, seem a little bit dangerous and more dangerous than if they were seen as an energy drink, a gum or a mint - something like that that's not a tobacco product.

NOGUCHI: Moran says the marketing suggests these new nicotine products want to lose their association with smoking altogether.

Vocabulary and Phrases:

1. **Regulators:** Authorities responsible for overseeing and enforcing rules and laws, especially in industries like health or finance.
2. **Crackdown:** Strong enforcement of rules or laws, often with increased penalties.
3. **Advocates:** People who publicly support or promote a particular cause or policy.
4. **On an uptick:** Increasing; on the rise.
5. **Guard is up:** Being cautious or alert to potential risks or dangers.
6. **Undetectable:** Unable to be seen or noticed.
7. **Niche:** A small, specialized segment of the market.
8. **Betrays (their intent):** Reveals or shows their true intentions, often when they are trying to hide them.
9. **Discretion:** The ability to behave in a way that avoids attracting attention.
10. **Inconspicuous:** Not noticeable or attracting attention.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What has led to the decline in e-cigarette use among teenagers, according to regulators?
2. Why are regulators concerned about the rise in sales of nicotine pouches?
3. How do nicotine pouches differ from traditional tobacco products in appearance and use?
4. What concern does Yolonda Richardson raise about the marketing of nicotine pouches?
5. How does Megan Moran describe the marketing strategy of nicotine pouches, and why is it concerning?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think nicotine pouches are becoming popular, especially among younger people? How do you feel about them being undetectable?
2. How might a crackdown on e-cigarettes have influenced the rise of other products like nicotine pouches?
3. Why do you think companies are marketing these products to be inconspicuous and emphasize discretion? What effect might this have on adults and kids?
4. How can advocates for public health help prevent the rise of new products like nicotine pouches that may harm young people?
5. What are the challenges regulators face when trying to keep their guard up against new and emerging tobacco products?