



## EXPOSING INDUSTRY TACTICS

# World No Tobacco Day: Q & A

There are 1.3 billion tobacco users worldwide. That number would be even larger if tobacco didn't kill half of its users. Every four seconds, tobacco takes another life. Decades of the tobacco industry's deception and devious tactics have hooked generations of users to nicotine and tobacco, driving this global epidemic.

The multi-billion-dollar industry recruits new tobacco and nicotine users to reward investors with as much profit as possible and keep its business alive. Tobacco and related industries have increasingly preyed on children and adolescents, employing advertising tactics and targeting them directly with a new portfolio of products that threaten their health. These industries are moving at a rapid speed to launch existing and new products and use every means to expand their market share before regulations can catch up with them.

Tobacco and related industries continue to oppose evidence-based measures, such as increases in excise taxes and comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and have threatened legal actions against governments that try to protect the health of their citizens.

### HOW HAS THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY PREVIOUSLY MANIPULATED PEOPLE AND ATTRACTED NEW USERS?

As awareness of the harms of tobacco use grew and global tobacco control efforts intensified over the last decade, social acceptability of tobacco use declined. This catalysed the tobacco industry to revisit old tactics to restore its tarnished reputation and secure a new generation of users.

The tobacco industry has made well-researched, calculated attempts to redesign and rebrand its products to sustain profitability. It introduced cigarette filters and the so-called "light" and "mild" tobacco products as an alternative to quitting, reducing tobacco users' perceptions of risk and harm (1), and undermining effective tobacco control policies (2). Such misleading marketing continues today, with the industry advocating for the harm reduction approach through new products such as electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and electronic non-nicotine delivery systems (ENNDS), commonly referred to as 'e-cigarettes', and heated tobacco products (HTPs).

### HOW ARE TOBACCO AND RELATED INDUSTRIES MARKETING NEW AND EMERGING PRODUCTS?

E-cigarettes are often promoted as "reduced risk", "smoke-free", "socially acceptable" consumer products. These promotional strategies have the potential to renormalize smoking and drive long-term use of addictive nicotine products which, like tobacco, are undoubtedly harmful to the consumer, under the guise of being a healthier alternative. Tobacco and related industries exploit the fact that the long-term health effects of e-cigarettes have not been established and they are not yet regulated in most countries, enabling them to work around tobacco advertising bans and promote use of their products in smoke-free environments (2).

Some manufacturers also tend to talk about e-cigarettes with HTPs together, thereby confusing potential consumers, and making it difficult to tell the difference between a tobacco and a non-tobacco product. These social-positioning techniques, coupled with strategic marketing tactics, are particularly effective in targeting children and adolescents and have the potential to sustain nicotine addiction in youth globally.



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### WHAT SPONSORSHIP SCHEMES ARE USED TO MANIPULATE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?

- Celebrity and influencer endorsements. Advertising is increasingly shifting to social media platforms, and the nicotine and tobacco industries are no different. “Influencers” on social media who reach and engage children and adolescents are invited by these industries to serve as “brand ambassadors” or offered financial incentives to promote their products (3, 4). Social influencers have the potential to give their audiences the impression of more authentic promotion of the products (5), particularly when posts do not disclose the sponsorship details.
- Scholarships. Tobacco and ENDS-related entities have offered scholarships to high school, college and graduate students (6, 7), some requiring applicants to submit essays on the dangers of tobacco and the potential benefits of ENDS use (8, 9).
- School programmes and youth camps. Tobacco and ENDS-related entities have paid schools for the opportunity to speak in classrooms or after school. They have also sponsored summer camps to spread misconceptions about the risks of ENDS use and market their products under the guise of promoting “safer alternatives” to conventional tobacco products (10).

### WHAT ADVERTISING TACTICS ARE USED TO TARGET NEW, YOUNG CONSUMERS?

- Digital and social media advertising. With the pervasiveness of smartphones and constant Internet access, nicotine and tobacco companies have strategically used digital and social media platforms to reach younger generations (2), including through their favourite apps and video games (11, 12). Social media platforms allow users to interact with the marketing features, which increases exposure and influence among children and adolescents (3). They also allow marketers to access profile details of users and their friends and effectively target potential customers (13). Countries that have adopted advertising, promotion and sponsorship bans, but have not explicitly banned cross-border advertising, are susceptible to exposing their youth to digital and social media advertising originating from other countries. Just over 100 hashtags associated with tobacco companies have been viewed more than 25 billion times around the world between 2007-2016 (4).
- Attractive displays in retail shops. Vendors near schools are frequently paid to display nicotine and tobacco products in their retail shops, along with sleek point-of-sale display boards, attractive marketing materials and bright, colourful cases to attract young customers (14). Modern, attractive retail spaces with a wide variety of products that appeal to youth are also now commonly used to market new and novel products.
- Advertising materials and products at eye-level of children. In many countries, nicotine and tobacco products can be found at children’s eye levels and near shops selling toys, electronic gadgets, sweets, snacks or soda (14).



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### WHAT MARKETING PLOYS ARE USED TO ATTRACT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS TO NICOTINE AND TOBACCO PRODUCTS?

- Flavours that appeal to youth. Tobacco products, such as smokeless and water pipe tobacco, are sold in sweet and fruity flavours, which may increase appeal to non-smokers and mask the harsh tobacco taste (15, 16). To date, researchers have identified over 15,000 e-cigarette flavours available, including flavours proven to appeal to youth, such as cotton candy and gummy bear (17). Advertisements of flavoured products may enhance appeal and encourage children and adolescents to buy and try nicotine products (18, 19). The flavours may lower perception of the harmfulness and addictiveness of nicotine products (20, 21).
- Sleek, pocket-sized designs. ENDS and HTPs are extensively promoted as modern, high-tech and high-end lifestyle products, with minimalist designs, and high-profile product launches that portray them as attractive and harmless products. The sleek designs can be deceptive, available in shapes resembling a USB flash drive, and can be easily concealed in a young person's hand.
- Cartoon characters. Some ENDS-related entities use cartoons and child-friendly imagery, such as unicorns, to brand their products and market sweet flavours (22).

### WHAT PROMOTIONAL TACTICS ARE USED TO TEMPT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?

- Product placement in entertainment media, such as television and cinema (23). Children and adolescents who watch movies and television shows containing depictions of smoking are at an increased risk of initiating smoking (24). Exposure to tobacco products or e-cigarette marketing in entertainment media influences children and adolescents' intention to use these products (25, 26).
- Free product samples. Nicotine and tobacco product samples are distributed in high traffic areas, and particularly venues frequented by youth, such as street corners, shopping malls, festivals and concerts, to attract new consumers (27, 28). In over 50 countries, at least 10% of students aged 13-15 reported ever being offered a free cigarette by a tobacco company representative (29).
- Merchandise with company logos. In over 120 countries, at least 1 in 10 students aged 13-15 reported having an object with a tobacco company logo on it (29).



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### WHAT DISTRIBUTION MECHANISMS ARE USED TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO THESE PRODUCTS?

- Single stick cigarettes. The sale of cigarettes individually or in small packets increases the affordability and accessibility of tobacco products for school children (30). Young people that start experimenting with single stick cigarettes do not benefit from exposure to health warnings on cigarette packs. A recent investigation in 45 countries found that students aged 13-15 reported recently purchasing single cigarettes, and in some countries, as many as 80% of students reported purchasing single cigarettes (14).
- Disposable e-cigarettes. The option to test and toss different flavours of e-liquids, particularly for a low initial cost, has driven use of disposable e-cigarettes among children and adolescents (31). In some countries, where flavours are banned in refillable cartridge-based e-cigarettes, children and adolescents have turned to disposable e-cigarettes to continue using flavoured products (32).
- Vending machines. Tobacco vending machines provide young people with easy access to tobacco products without needing to provide a form of identification to verify age. In some countries, tobacco vending machines are placed in areas frequented by youth, such as near schools, with attractive advertising and pack displays (14).
- Internet sales. Nicotine and tobacco products sold online facilitate sale to minors, particularly where age verification mechanisms are not in place (33). Online sales also allow children and adolescents to purchase products being sold in other countries where regulations may differ (3,34).

### MORE INFORMATION



For more information on [tobacco](#)



For more information on [heated tobacco products](#)



For more information on [e-cigarettes](#)





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