

Flavored Tobacco Pellets Are Denounced as a Lure to Young Users

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By [DUFF WILSON](#)

A research study and editorial to be published Monday in the medical journal *Pediatrics* takes direct aim at a novel tobacco product that some critics say too closely resembles Tic Tac breath mints.

R. J. Reynolds Tobacco, the nation's second-largest cigarette maker behind Philip Morris, is test marketing the product, Camel Orbs, along with other dissolvable tobacco products, in three cities. It is part of a broad industry trend to create smokeless products in response to declining cigarette use and the rise of smoke-free air laws.

The study says Orbs, pellets made of finely ground tobacco with mint or cinnamon flavoring, are packed with [nicotine](#) and can poison children and lure young people to start using tobacco. The pellets dissolve in the mouth, like breath mints. "Nicotine is a highly addictive drug, and to make it look like a piece of candy is recklessly playing with the health of children," the lead researcher, [Gregory N. Connolly](#), a professor with the Harvard School of Public Health, said in an interview.

Camel Orbs began test marketing last year in stores in Portland, Ore., Columbus, Ohio, and Indianapolis. They have also been advertised in popular magazines including *People*, *Wired* and *Rolling Stone*. One ad says: "Enjoy Anywhere. Anytime. Anyplace."

David Howard, a Reynolds spokesman, said Camel Orbs were marketed only for adults and come in child-resistant containers. He denied that they look like Tic Tac mints.

"Those packages don't at all look alike to me," Mr. Howard said in an interview Friday.

But other people detected youth appeal. Emily A. Kile, 18, a high school senior involved in antismoking efforts in Greenfield, Ind., said, "Kids can sit in class, you know, and use it and nobody would know."

Mike Moran, the police chief of Talent, Ore., 280 miles south of Portland, said he found a group of teenagers last spring sharing Camel Orbs taken from one of their older brothers.

Mr. Howard of Reynolds said it was unfair to criticize the flavoring of Camel Orbs because many other products, including the quit-[smoking](#) aid Nicogum, come in flavors. Mr. Howard also said many other common products posed risks to infants or children from accidental ingestion.

“Virtually every household has products that could be hazardous to children, like cleaning supplies, medicines, health and beauty products, and you compare that to 20 to 25 percent of households that use tobacco products,” he said.

But Dr. Jonathan P. Winickoff, a [Harvard](#) medical professor and chairman of the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) Tobacco Consortium, said tobacco and Camel Orbs posed special risks.

“The difference here is that kids potentially will be watching grown-ups ingesting these products,” he said in an interview. “The last time I checked, we don’t have adults drinking toilet bowl cleanser in front of their kids.”

Dr. Winickoff, who advised Professor Connolly on where to publish the study, contended that the tobacco industry was creating novel products partly to entice and addict a new generation of smokers to replace those who die.

It is the sort of assertion all major tobacco companies deny, saying they are just providing product choices to adult smokers.

The [study](#), released Monday on the journal’s Web site, found that Camel Orbs had an extremely high level of absorbable nicotine because of the alkalinity of the product. An Orb sampled by this reporter had a very minty taste and seemed to deliver a jolt of nicotine. The study also found 13,705 reports to the nation’s poison control centers of ingestion of tobacco products of all sorts by children under age 6 from 2006 through 2008, of which 1,768 were from smokeless products.

Professor Connolly said researchers found one specific case of accidental ingestion of a Camel Orb pellet by a 3-year-old in Oregon, although the child did not need medical attention. Other children suffered nausea or [vomiting](#) from eating other tobacco products. But Professor Connolly estimated that the nicotine in 10 to 17 orbs could kill an infant.

In a commentary in *Pediatrics*, Dr. Laurence R. Deyton, director of the newly formed Center for Tobacco Products at the [Food and Drug Administration](#), and Dr. Marisa L. Cruz, also from the center, wrote about the “unique concerns” of dissolvable tobacco. New Reynolds products also include a thin strip similar to some breath mint products and a stick resembling a toothpick.

“The candy-like appearance, added flavors, and easily concealable size of many of these products

may be particularly appealing to children and adolescents,” they wrote.

The dissolvable products are the second priority for review by the F.D.A. office, after [menthol cigarettes](#), under legislation passed by Congress last year. The law put tobacco products under government review for the first time. Reynolds has been required to provide the F.D.A. with about 13,000 pages of research and other materials about dissolvable tobacco products.

Senator [Jeff Merkley](#), Democrat of Oregon, co-sponsored an amendment that was included in the new law and required the F.D.A. to study dissolvable products within two years. Depending on the outcome of that review, the agency could ban them or require product changes.

“They’re tobacco candy,” Senator Merkley said Friday. “Everything about them is designed for kids. We know from research that for people to be addicted to nicotine, you’ve got to get them before 21 when their brain is still developing.”