

The background of the page is a light blue-grey color. Scattered across this background are numerous nicotine pouches in various colors (white, orange, green) and a small clear plastic container filled with more pouches. A white circular object, possibly a lid, is also visible.

Nicotine Pouches

Downpour of a new product and
a rising threat to public health

March 2025



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This report provides an overview of nicotine pouches, focusing on their rising popularity and associated public health concerns. The report also reviews the regulatory landscape.

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Key

Nicotine pouches pose significant health risks, including addiction, cardiovascular issues, and oral health problems.

The marketing of nicotine pouches, particularly through social media, often targets young users with attractive flavours and misleading advertisements, increasing their risk of early addiction.

While some countries like Belgium and Canada have implemented strict regulations or bans on nicotine pouches, there is still a legal gap in Europe allowing these products to be widely sold without sufficient regulation.

Facts

A new product floods the market, representing a growing threat to public health 01

Nicotine pouches are smokeless (tobacco) products that are usually sold in pouches. They don't contain material extracted from tobacco leaves, but rather just nicotine, usually in the form of nicotine salts, which are transported more quickly and efficiently to the brain.

The main brands of nicotine pouches belong to the big tobacco companies and pose problems for public health.

High doses of nicotine

The nicotine content of pouches varies greatly, depending on the brand and product. The level typically ranges from 2 mg to 30 mg per pouch. In Switzerland, pouches are often categorised into categories of strength such as low, regular, strong, and extra strong to accommodate varying user preferences and tolerances.

However, the packaging is sometimes misleading about the actual nicotine levels, which can be higher than indicated. In one study, levels as high as 47.5 mg were found. Furthermore, 44 products were found to contain tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNAs), which are carcinogenic, despite the fact that these products are marketed as not containing tobacco.

Health risks

Nicotine pouches, while marketed as less harmful alternatives to smoking, carry several health risks that should not be overlooked. Since they are a relatively new product, the long-term health impacts of using nicotine pouches are not yet clear. However, studies show that they are not without risk. For example, nicotine can cause health problems, increase blood pressure, and weaken the immune system. Here are some of the main associated risks:

Nicotine addiction:

The pouches contain large amounts of nicotine, which is highly addictive. Users can become addicted to them just as easily as with traditional cigarettes, especially since these pouches allow for a high level of nicotine absorption. In Switzerland, moreover, there is no maximum legal limit for nicotine in these products. This is particularly worrying for young people, as it can cause physical changes in the developing brain and lead to a propensity for addiction.



ZYN COOL MINT X-STRONG

Fresh peppermint. Rich nicotine experience in a slim pouch size. Nicotine strength: X-STRONG Nicotine level: 11mg

CHF 7,00



ZYN ICY MINT X-STRONG

Eucalyptus and menthol. Rich nicotine experience in a slim pouch size. Nicotine strength: X-STRONG. Nicotine level: 11mg

CHF 7,00



ZYN SPEARMINT STRONG

Rounded spearmint. Rich nicotine experience in a slim pouch size. Nicotine strength: STRONG Nicotine level: 9.5mg

CHF 7,00

Flavours:

Nicotine pouches are available in attractive flavours such as berry, cinnamon, and peppermint that are particularly appealing to young users, as is also the case for disposable e-cigarettes. The flavours used also carry toxicological risks that are still poorly defined.

Cardiovascular problems:

Nicotine pouches may pose an increased risk for arterial hypertension, atherosclerosis, or myocardial infarction especially for consumers with an already existing cardiovascular disease.

Oral health effects:

Regular use of nicotine pouches can irritate the gums and lead to gum recession, increased sensitivity, and other oral health problems. Although the scientific evidence is still limited, more and more studies show the risks to oral health.

Mental health risks:

Nicotine from pouches can affect the brain's reward system, which can reduce attention span and exacerbate symptoms of anxiety and stress, particularly in adolescents.

Acute toxicity:

We are beginning to see cases of acute nicotine toxicity from the use of these pouches. These pouches are emerging as a new method of nicotine consumption and pose a serious risk of accidental overdose and harm.

Cancer:

The presence of tobacco-specific nitrosamines in oral tobacco products has been linked to the development of certain types of cancer. Given that nicotine pouches also consistently contain these specific nitrosamines, and although long-term studies are not yet specific to nicotine pouches alone, there is no reason to believe that these products would pose a different risk for these same types of cancer.

Multiple use:

Nicotine pouches are rarely used in isolation or in situations where smoking or vaping is not possible. Use of multiple products greatly increases health risks.

Practically invisible Products

02

Nicotine pouches are designed to be discreet and easy to conceal without attracting attention, which poses several problems, particularly related to young people's use of them. First, their small size and lack of smoke or significant odor allow users to consume nicotine in a nearly invisible way. This can facilitate the use of nicotine in places where smoking and vaping are prohibited, such as schools or workplaces.



Second, this discreet consumption can complicate the efforts of parents, educators, and health professionals to monitor and limit young people's access to nicotine, increasing the risk of early addiction. Indeed, the ease of access and ability to consume nicotine discreetly can encourage a habit of regular consumption among adolescents, often without the knowledge of their relatives.

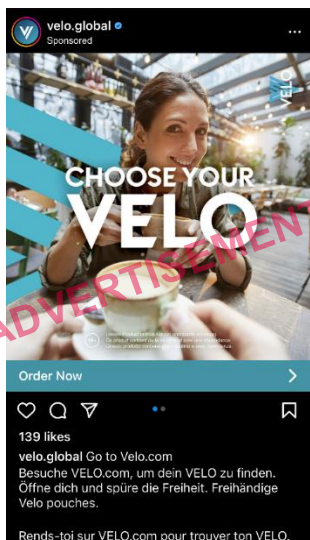
These factors contribute to broader concerns about public health and the regulation of these products, including the need for stricter regulation and preventative measures to reduce the appeal of these products to young people.

An Exploding Market

Sales of ZYN nicotine pouches are surging in the United States, with **385 million** boxes sold in 2023 and *an annual rate equivalent of 443 million boxes by the end of the first quarter of 2024*. At 15 pouches per box, that comprises about 6.6 billion pouches. By mid-2024, ZYN sales have grown so rapidly that intense demand is outpacing Philip Morris International's (PMI) ability to manufacture the product, and many vendors' stocks are rationed or they are out of stock altogether.

Marketing

Nicotine pouches are heavily marketed by the tobacco industry. Moreover, a lot of marketing on social media is aimed at young people.



The appeal of ZYN nicotine pouches, particularly among young people, is largely influenced by the advertising strategies and distribution channels used. A report (WHO, currently being published) analysed a large collection of ZYN advertisements (1,680 images, 739 videos), mostly distributed via social media. The recurring slogan, "Find your ZYN", subtly suggests that using ZYN can achieve a state of calm and relaxation, evoking an almost medicinal effect.

This advertising campaign also promotes other benefits such as courage, misleading claims because the nicotine the product contains does not produce these effects. In addition, ZYN's ads often follow the same techniques used in cigarette advertising in the past, associating the brand with an image of active youth and social and romantic success. Despite claims of primarily targeting adult smokers, the use of social media to distribute the ads makes these products particularly appealing to young people.



The tobacco industry, as it has done in the past with cigarettes, is trying to manipulate public opinion by paying for and distributing biased reports to make it appear that nicotine pouches present a significantly reduced risk, and claiming that the product “would save lives”.

Regulation in Europe and Switzerland

03

Snus has been banned in the **European Union** since the EU Tobacco Products Directive came into force in 1992. This ban is based on concerns about the health risks associated with tobacco use. **Sweden**, where snuff is very popular, was granted an exemption from this ban when it joined the EU in 1995.

Nicotine pouches first appeared in Sweden around 2010 and were introduced in the US in 2024 (brand ZYN, from Swedish Match, a company acquired by PMI in 2022).

Nicotine pouches (without tobacco) are currently allowed in **Europe** due to a legal loophole on the part of the EU. A ban is under consideration as part of the revision of the EU Tobacco Products Directive.

In **Switzerland**, snuff (with tobacco) was authorised for sale in 2019, and nicotine pouches are freely available. The pouches are widely sold in stores and kiosks and particularly on online sales sites at very attractive prices. These pouches will only be banned from sale to minors once the new tobacco product law comes into effect.

Some EU countries have adopted stricter measures. In **Belgium**, the sale of nicotine pouches has been prohibited since 1 October 2023. This ban is based on concerns about the risks to public health and the high potential for addiction.

In **Norway**, according to the current regulations, all new tobacco and nicotine products must be approved by the Norwegian Directorate of Health in order to be introduced and sold on the Norwegian market. The main objective of this approval system is to protect children and young people from new products and nicotine addiction. In their assessment, the public health agency must give considerable weight to the potential for a new product to appeal to children and young people. No nicotine pouches have yet been approved for sale there, and applications filed so far have been refused.



Regulations elsewhere in the world

Canada

On 28 August 2024, the Canadian federal government banned the sale of nicotine pouches in convenience stores and banned flavours (except mint and menthol) to prevent young people from being introduced to nicotine through this product. Nicotine pouches can now only be sold behind the counter in pharmacies. By authorising them only under strict and limited conditions as a replacement therapy, the Canadian government is thus prohibiting their sale to the general public outside of therapeutic use.

Japan:

Nicotine pouches that contain tobacco are illegal in Japan. However, nicotine pouches without tobacco are sold legally. The sale of these products is regulated under the Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Act of Japan, which means that manufacturers and distributors must follow specific guidelines regarding ingredients, labelling, and marketing.

As the examples in Canada and Japan clearly show, international regulation of these products is varied and can evolve very quickly.



Swiss association
for tobacco control

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