# The FDA's War on Nicotine Will Encourage Americans To Smoke More Cigarettes

ERIC BOEHM

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America's public health officials continue to undermine public health.

In a misguided attempt to get Americans to stop smoking, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is reportedly considering new regulations that would likely force smokers to light up *more* cigarettes in order to get their hit of nicotine.

The Biden administration is considering requiring cigarette manufacturers to decrease the amount of nicotine in cigarettes as part of a series of new rules that could be rolled out in the coming months, *The Wall Street Journal* reports. Ostensibly, this is meant to make cigarettes less addictive, thus reducing the number of people who become addicted to them in the first place in the future.

Of course, that ignores the massive consequences that the proposed rules could have for the health and finances of anyone currently nursing a nicotine addiction. The FDA would be effectively telling smokers that they have to buy many more cigarettes—and inhale much more cancer-causing tar—to get their fix. (Maybe that would be enough to make some smokers switch to vaping, if only the FDA wasn't determined to make that alternative as expensive and unattractive as possible too.)

"Cutting the nicotine yield might have the unintended consequence of smokers taking more puffs, inhaling more deeply, and holding the smoke in longer," writes Jeffrey Singer, an Arizona-based physician and senior fellow at the Cato Institute. "While nicotine is addictive, the tars in tobacco smoke are what do all of the damage to health. Reducing nicotine content might paradoxically make smoking *more* dangerous." (Disclosure: Singer is a financial supporter of Reason Foundation, the nonprofit that publishes this website.)

The FDA hasn't even finished cleaning the blood off its hands from the botched response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inept public health bureaucracy is already plotting new ways to kill Americans.

The FDA says that implementing the low-nicotine requirement would cause about 5 million Americans to quit smoking. But there are roughly 34 million smokers in America right now. What, exactly, does the FDA expect the rest of them to do?

Like in other situations where an addictive substance has been effectively outlawed, some of the consequences are easy to conceive. Consider what would happen if the government mandated

that the alcohol content of legally sold drinks could not exceed 1 percent, says Guy Bentley, the director of consumer freedom research at Reason Foundation.

"Some drinkers would likely quit liquor altogether or switch to an alternative alcoholic beverage," Bentley notes. "But it would be naive to assume that a large portion of them wouldn't seek out their favored booze through illegal channels."

In fact, there's a convenient real-world example of exactly how this would play out. I mean, an example in addition to America's own experience with alcohol Prohibition and the failed (and finally, maybe, coming to an end) War on Drugs.

In 2004, the tiny nation of Bhutan banned the sale and consumption of tobacco products. The ban triggered the creation of a robust black market for cigarettes, and by 2017 Bhutan had the highest smoking rate of any country in Asia.

For that matter, the FDA could just look at places like New York City, where cigarettes are still legal but astronomical taxes on tobacco products have stimulated a significant black market for "loosies." Enforcing what would effectively be a national ban on cigarettes containing more than a trace amount of nicotine would require treating otherwise law-abiding Americans like criminals—and it would lead to more tragic outcomes like the 2014 killing of Eric Garner, who was suffocated to death by a New York City cop after being caught with untaxed cigarettes.

It's tempting to view this whole proposed mess as another example of the Biden administration's propensity to expand regulatory control over Americans' lives even in circumstances where the benefits of such regulations are difficult to identify—or wholly nonexistent.

But the idea of limiting the amount of nicotine in cigarettes actually originated, the *Journal* notes, during the tenure of Scott Gottlieb, the first FDA commissioner of the Trump administration. It seems that changing the occupant of the White House won't stop the FDA from pursuing counterproductive, nanny state policies. Maybe we should just abolish the FDA instead