



PRESS RELEASE

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The CNCT alerts on the use of a new addictive molecule used by the tobacco industry: 6-methyl-nicotine

Paris, 26 May 2025 – The theme of this year's World No Tobacco Day is "Unmasking The Appeal", which aims to reveal the tactics employed by the tobacco and nicotine industries to make their products more attractive, particularly to the young. On this occasion, the French National Committee for Tobacco Control (CNCT – Comité national contre le tabagisme) is warning about the worrying emergence and promotion of 6-methyl-nicotine (also known as metatine). This nicotine analogue, recently identified in several vaping products and oral pouches marketed in France – and misleadingly presented as innovative, tobacco-free or nicotine-free – is highly addictive. The marketing strategies behind these products are similar to those used for vaping devices and pouches containing nicotine: they utilise advertising messages that are prohibited by the legislation on vaping products. As a result, because of Aroma King's illicit advertising, the CNCT will be taking legal action against the manufacturer for marketing products containing this new molecule.

6-methyl-nicotine: an addictive molecule with worrying effects

6-methyl-nicotine (marketed under the brand name Nonic) is a compound derived from traditional nicotine. It has a high addictive potential, up to 3.3 times that of nicotine, according to pre-clinical studies.[1]–[2] It may also increase the production of dopamine, which would reinforce the addiction. Furthermore, the molecule promotes the development of reactive oxygen species in lung cells, which is associated with inflammatory reactions and cellular damage. Its long-term impact is, as yet, unknown.

This molecule enables the tobacco industry to circumvent regulations which limit the maximum concentrations of nicotine and the capacity of the tanks of vaping devices, thereby ensuring that consumers, particularly the young and the vulnerable, become addicted to its products.

Ever-more innovative and aggressive marketing strategies aimed at a young audience

Faced with the increasing tightening-up of national and international tobacco control regulations, the tobacco and nicotine industry is becoming increasingly ingenious in its efforts to maintain its market share and win new markets, particularly among the young. It deploys sophisticated commercial strategies, combining technological innovations, behavioural targeting and exploitation of legal loopholes, with the aim of reducing the effectiveness of public policies.

The use of 6-methyl-nicotine, a synthetic molecule recently detected in vaping products and oral pouches, illustrates this desire to circumvent existing regulatory frameworks while simultaneously introducing highly addictive substances on the market.

At the same time, the industry is intensifying its actions on several fronts. It is stepping up promotional marketing activities at points-of-sale, particularly at tobacconists, to promote heated tobacco devices such as IQOS – in violation of the advertising ban. It is diversifying the flavours, particularly sweet and fruit flavourings, in vaping products, which encourages young consumers to start using them. It is also marketing new “smart” vaping devices, that incorporate fun elements such as mini games, with the aim of normalising use and attracting a young and vulnerable audience.

The industry is investing heavily in digital channels. It distributes promotional content via influencers on social networks and finances targeted advertising on search engines and digital platforms, including audiences who do not consume nicotine. These practices, which are illegal – or on the fringes of the law – aim to normalise addictive products, to circumvent advertising bans and to recruit a new generation of consumers.

Regulating all substances that act on nicotine receptors

Faced with the intensification of the tobacco and nicotine industry’s enticement strategies, the French National Committee for Tobacco Control is renewing its recommendations, in line with the findings of its latest surveys.

It calls for:

- The extension of the ban on online sales to include vaping products, and the restriction of their distribution to strictly supervised physical outlets;
- The effective enforcement of the ban on unauthorised nicotine products, such as nicotine pouches and beads, as well as all related advertising;
- The strengthening of controls to ensure that existing measures are applied;
- The stiffening of penalties to ensure that they have a real deterrent effect in the face of repeated circumvention.

Regarding nicotine analogues, and in particular 6-methyl-nicotine (recently identified in vaping products and oral pouches) the CNCT recommends that the regulations should be applied to any substance with a pharmacological effect on nicotine receptors, whether or not, nicotine, in the strictest sense, is contained.

This approach would make it possible to anticipate bypasses by the industry, prevent the marketing of potentially dangerous and highly addictive products, and better protect the young – the primary target of these toxic innovations.

"These devices, along with the marketing strategies that support them, are being deployed by the tobacco industry with a clear objective: to circumvent the regulations in force and expand their consumer base, including among the very young. Once again, this commercial logic is being pursued with total disregard for public health. The industry's shameless cynicism is clear: it is systematically stepping up its efforts to oppose any protective regulatory measures" – Professor Yves Martinet, President of the French National Committee for Tobacco Control (CNCT)

To raise awareness about this phenomenon, the CNCT is also launching a digital awareness campaign entitled "The Taste of Lies". It is aimed at public authorities, health professionals, the public and particularly the young. It focuses on the insidious new strategies deployed by the tobacco industry to entice a new generation of consumers. Disseminated on TikTok, Snapchat, Meta and YouTube, the campaign decodes the industry's marketing rhetoric and reveals the mechanisms through which addictive products can become normalised, with the aim of deceiving young consumers about their true nature and effects.

[1] R. J. Bainton, L. T. Tsai, C. M. Singh, M. S. Moore, W. S. Neckameyer, and U. Heberlein, "Dopamine Modulates Acute Responses to Cocaine, Nicotine and Ethanol in *Drosophila*," *Current Biology* 10, no. 4 (2000): 187–194, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0960-9822\(00\)00336-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0960-9822(00)00336-5).

[1] Jordt SE, Jabba SV. Introduction of nicotine analogue-containing oral pouch products in the United States. *Tobacco Prevention & Cessation*. 2024;10(November):61. doi:10.18332/tpc/195621.

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