

[Opinion Editorials](#)

Our View: Flavored tobacco ban is better late than never

It shouldn't be difficult. With 35 statutes in place across Minnesota, surely there is one that would work here. Put a team together, study what's been done, and put the top contenders up for a vote.



Post Bulletin illustration

By [Post Bulletin Editorial Board](#)

Today at 7:30 AM

Many readers of this editorial likely remember a time when the local dime store, mercantile or sweet shop offered a variety of candy cigarettes. These chalky sugar sticks first hit the market in the 1930s, and 50 years later they remained about as flavorful as the colorful boxes they came in. But to a 10-year-old who wanted to look cool, there was nothing better than pretending to puff away on a red-tipped “Lucky Light” or “Victory” candy cigarette.

Today, Maine and Tennessee prohibit the sale of candy cigarettes, as do Canada, the UK, Australia, Brazil and other countries. And in 2009, the city of St. Paul banned the sale of candy cigarettes, bubble-gum cigars and “Big League Chew” shredded bubble gum.

But you still can find these products in nostalgia candy shops across much of the country, including Minnesota. They're now sold as “candy sticks,” and the red tip is gone, but the vibe is the same. It's candy masquerading as tobacco.

Tobacco masquerading as candy is much, much worse.

A little over three years ago, the Olmsted County Board briefly considered a countywide ban on the sale of flavored tobacco products. With the exploding popularity of vaping and clear evidence that fruit- and candy-flavored vape products make it far too easy to hook kids on nicotine, it made perfect sense that the county that once was at the forefront of Minnesota's workplace smoking ban would take direct action to protect its youth from candy-like tobacco products.

But the board backed down. It never held a public comment session on this subject, and never came close to an actual vote. At that time, the board justified this decision in the usual ways, using arguments along the lines of “We can't save the world,” and “If we ban flavored tobacco, shouldn't we ban sugar and alcohol, too?”



Dr. Cree Kachelski speaks during a launch event for the Love Your Lungs Olmsted coalition Tuesday, April 28, 2026, in Rochester. The coalition, made up of local youth, parents health care professionals and school administrators, is working to make the case for stronger policy and regulations around commercial flavored tobacco products in Olmsted County.

Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

This wasn't the board's finest moment, and it hasn't improved with age. Today, more than one-third of Minnesota's population resides in areas with full or partial restrictions on the sale of flavored tobacco

products. Eight counties have done what the Olmsted County Board refused to do three years ago, as have the cities of Duluth, Moorhead and most cities and suburbs in the metro area. In total, 35 jurisdictions in Minnesota have imposed restrictions on flavored tobacco — but the home of Mayo Clinic has not.

It's time to act.

Yes, we realize that imposing such a ban would be complicated and imperfect. We know that the term “flavored” can sometimes apply to mint- or menthol-flavored tobacco products that don't target teens but are popular among certain demographic groups. We know that what's banned in Olmsted County would still be available in neighboring counties (for now at least), so we won't pretend that a ban would totally prevent local teenagers from vaping watermelon-flavored nicotine. A ban would be an obstacle, not a barrier.

But to borrow an oft-quoted aphorism, we can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

On May 2, the Post Bulletin published a guest column by Stewartville High School Principal Katie Morlock, who has witnessed firsthand the soaring popularity of vape products among teenagers. She described seeing the daily struggles of students who are addicted to nicotine. She pointed out that many addicted kids don't realize what they are inhaling — but they know they need it. And she explained that even students who don't vape are being indirectly affected by the behaviors of those who do.



A woman smokes an electronic cigarette in Paris on Feb. 3, 2026.

Julie Sebadelha/AFP/Getty Images/TNS

Morlock's column should be required reading for every county board member, every member of the Rochester City Council — and every parent in Olmsted County, where 10% of teens reported vaping in 2022. We have no doubt that this percentage has increased during the past four years, and it will continue to rise if local leaders sit on their hands.

It shouldn't be difficult. With 35 statutes in place across Minnesota, surely there is one that would work in Olmsted County. Put a team together, study what's been done elsewhere and put the top contenders up for a vote.

Let's not wait for the state to take action. Do our kids a favor: Make it tougher for them to acquire an addiction that could rule — or ruin — their lives.