

Connecticut Department of Public Health Fact Sheet

Tobacco Control Program | June 2023

MENTHOL FLAVORED TOBACCO PRODUCTS

What is Menthol...?

Menthol is a chemical compound found naturally in peppermint and other similar plants. It can also be produced in a lab. The menthol in cigarettes creates a cooling sensation in the throat and airways when the user inhales, making cigarette smoke feel less harsh on the user. Menthol is used in many tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, cigars, hookah tobacco, smokeless tobacco, nicotine pouches, and heated tobacco products.¹



Background

- Currently, tobacco manufacturers cannot market cigarettes with ‘characterizing flavors’, except for cigarettes that taste like menthol or tobacco. This exception was included within the Tobacco Control Act that was signed into federal law in 2009, which also gave the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority over tobacco products.²
- The FDA announced that flavored electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), also known as e-cigarettes or electronic vapor products or devices, pods and cartridges would no longer be sold after February 6, 2020, with an exception for both tobacco and menthol flavors. This restriction does not extend to tanks, e-liquids, or disposables, and does not include any other tobacco products.³
- On April 29, 2021, the FDA announced that it would proceed with drafting product standards that will both eliminate the current exemption for menthol cigarettes and remove flavors from all cigar products. The proposed rulemaking was expected to be released within a year but has yet to be finalized due to multiple challenges.⁴



Among Connecticut high school students who smoked cigarettes, nearly 50% reported usually smoking menthols⁵

The Menthol Problem

- A previous FDA report on the health impact of menthol cigarettes determined that menthol in cigarettes leads to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction, and a harder time quitting.⁶
- Flavored products are often the first tobacco products youth and young adults ever use and are a key driver of the youth vaping epidemic, given that nearly 94% of youth who vape use flavored products.⁶
- The amount of tar, nicotine, and other poisons are 30-70% higher in inhaled menthol cigarettes than in non-menthol cigarettes.⁷
- Menthol cigarettes contribute to tobacco-related health disparities in the US,⁵ disproportionately affecting groups that were historically less likely to smoke, including young people, racial and ethnic minority groups, and women. These groups have been aggressively targeted with advertising for menthol cigarettes.^{8,9}
- The tobacco industry marketed menthol cigarettes as being healthier and safer than non-menthol products and used advertisements that emphasized their cool, refreshing taste, leading many people to smoke because they believed these false claims.⁷



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we can help reduce menthol tobacco use and help people quit using tobacco products by:¹⁰



- Increasing equitable access to evidence-based quitting resources, including counseling and medication
- Implementing policies that prohibit or decrease sales of menthol tobacco products



For More Information, Contact:

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- ⁵State of Connecticut Department of Public Health; Connecticut Youth Tobacco Survey, 2015.
- ⁶Food and Drug Administration. *Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes*. 2013. Available at: <https://www.fda.gov/media/86497/download>.
- ⁷Smoking & Tobacco Use: Menthol and Cigarettes. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 2021. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/tobacco_industry/menthol-cigarettes/ and <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/african-americans/index.htm>.
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- ¹⁰Office on Smoking and Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. “Menthol Tobacco Products.” Accessed June 7, 2021. [Menthol and Cigarettes | Smoking and Tobacco Use | CDC](#).