

Connecticut Department of Public Health Fact Sheet

Tobacco Control Program | December 2022

FLAVORED TOBACCO PRODUCTS

What Are Flavored Tobacco Products....?

Flavored tobacco products can be described as all tobacco products that have added flavoring. Such products include menthol cigarettes (other cigarette flavorings are prohibited), cigarillos, little and large cigars, smokeless tobacco, vapes and hookahs. There are well over 15,000 unique flavors¹ including fruit, ice cream, cotton candy, chocolate, alcoholic beverage, and spice flavors. Many of the flavors and much of the packaging were developed to attract and addict children and young adults to tobacco.

Prohibiting Flavors: The Tobacco Control Act was signed into federal law in 2009 and gave the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the power to regulate the tobacco industry. Part of the new law prohibited the sale of cigarettes with any “characterizing” flavor, other than tobacco or menthol, but there was no similar mandate included for other tobacco products. The Act did give the FDA the power to prohibit the use of flavors, including menthol, in all tobacco products in the future.²



use initiation among youth and reduce tobacco-related mortality and morbidity.⁴ Removing the flavor from cigars and the coolness of menthol from cigarettes will lessen their appeal, particularly for youth and young adults, which will help decrease the likelihood of experimentation, development of nicotine dependence, and progression to regular use, all leading to improved and more equitable public health.

Flavored ENDS Use: In Connecticut in 2021, approximately 15,600 or 10.6% of high school students used ENDS, including e-cigarettes, on 1 or more of the last 30 days. They are the most commonly used tobacco product among youth. More than 9 out of 10 students who use ENDS, report using flavored products.⁵

Targeting the LGBT Community: Tobacco companies have advertised at LGBT+ community events, contributed to HIV/AIDS organizations, and are visible at gay pride festivals. A marketing project was launched in the 1990s by RJ Reynolds company that specifically targeted the LGBT community. Ads for flavored tobacco products have used LGBT symbolism, including phrases like "Take pride in your flavor" or images of colored packages arranged like a rainbow.⁶



Since 2015, electronic vaping products, such as e-cigarettes, have been the most popular tobacco products used by Connecticut high school students. Results from the 2021 Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that 94% of students who vaped used a flavored product. The most common flavors used were candy, fruit and desserts



What is Menthol...?

Menthol is a flavor additive with a minty taste and smell. Besides tasting good, it has a cooling and painkilling effect. Cigarette manufacturers add it to cigarette filters to hide the unpleasant taste of tobacco and make cigarettes more appealing.⁷

The tobacco industry has relied on the soothing effect of menthol to make cigarettes easier to smoke, and they are especially popular among the following groups:⁸

- Youth
- Black Americans
- New smokers
- Mentally ill
- Low income
- LGBT

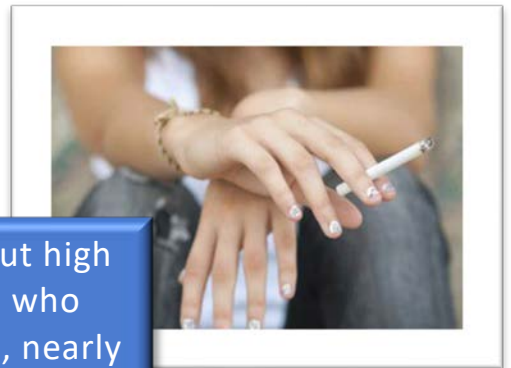


Menthol Cigarettes and the Black Community: It is estimated that nearly 19 million people in the US smoke menthol cigarettes, and a disproportionate number of these smokers are Black Americans. The tobacco industry has aggressively marketed menthol-flavored tobacco products to the Black community for decades.⁸

A new study was done that measured the harm menthol cigarettes have inflicted upon Black Americans. From the research, it was calculated that menthol cigarettes were responsible for 1.5 million new smokers, 157,000 smoking-related premature deaths and 1.5 million life-years lost for Black Americans between 1980 and 2018.⁹

Menthol Cigarette Dangers: The cigarette smoking rate in Connecticut and the US has been decreasing for years, but menthol cigarettes are one segment of the tobacco market that remains resilient. The following are three reasons menthol cigarettes are so popular and dangerous:⁶

- **People Who Use Menthols Smoke More:** The minty coolness from the menthol covers up the harshness of the tobacco and makes smoking more easily tolerated. It reduces airway pain and irritation and suppresses coughing, giving smokers the illusion of breathing more easily. Subsequently, menthol users are able to inhale more deeply and smoke more cigarettes. That means over their smoking lifetime, they will breathe in more toxic chemicals and tar from cigarettes.
- **Menthols Are Harder to Quit:** Studies conducted by the FDA and the Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee found that menthol cigarette smokers are more likely to be dependent on cigarettes and have more trouble quitting. The research showed that Black smokers are more likely than White smokers to try to quit but less likely to be successful. The lower quit rate is thought to be associated with the higher nicotine dependence from menthol cigarettes. There is a disproportionate health impact in communities with a higher rate of menthol cigarette use, which helps explain the higher rate of lung cancer among Black Americans than in any other race.
- **Menthols Appeal to Young Smokers:** Studies have shown that young people who start using menthol cigarettes are more likely to become addicted and become long-term daily smokers.



Among Connecticut high school students who smoked cigarettes, nearly 50% reported usually smoking menthols¹⁰

[†]The term "LGBT" is used in this document refers to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.



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Last updated: November 25, 2022

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- ²Tobacco Control Legal Consortium "Tobacco Control Act of 2009"; <https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/topics/commercial-tobacco-control/menthol-and-other-flavored-products> [accessed 2019 Dec 21].
- ³Guidance is available at <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/enforcement-priorities-electronic-nicotine-delivery-system-ends-and-other-deemed-products-market>
- ⁴[FDA Proposes Rules Prohibiting Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars to Prevent Youth Initiation, Significantly Reduce Tobacco-Related Disease and Death | FDA](#)
- ⁵State of Connecticut Department of Public Health; Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021.
- ⁶Stevens P, Carlson LM, Hinman JM. [An analysis of tobacco industry marketing to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender \(LGBT\) populations: strategies for mainstream tobacco control and prevention](#). *Health Promot Pract* 2004;5(Suppl):129S–34S [accessed 2022 Aug 23].
- ⁷End Tobacco Program; University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center; <https://www.mdanderson.org/research/departments-labs-institutes/programs-centers/endtobacco-program.html> [accessed 2022 Aug 22].
- ⁸Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's public online data analysis system (PDAS). National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2019.
- ⁹Mendez D, Le Thuy TT. Consequences of a match made in hell: the harm caused by menthol smoking to the African American population over 1980-2018. *Tob Control*. 2021 Sep 16:tobaccocontrol-2021-056748.
- ¹⁰State of Connecticut Department of Public Health; Connecticut Youth Tobacco Survey, 2015.