There is established evidence pointing to the harms of menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products. Using menthol is linked to greater nicotine addiction and unsuccessful quit attempts among smokers who want to quit. In fact, scientists conducting laboratory studies report that menthol flavor triggers nicotine cravings.

The science is very, very clear: menthol is not just flavor. The tobacco industry uses menthol and mint flavoring to mask nicotine’s bitter taste and harshness of tobacco smoke, making it easier to start smoking and harder to quit. Indeed, menthol flavoring is so effective in masking tobacco’s harshness when smoking or vaping, that it can even mask the early signs of tobacco-related diseases!
3. THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY HAS A LONG HISTORY OF TARGETING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, PARTICULARLY WITH MENTHOL CIGARETTES AND FLAVORED CIGARS

The FDA’s announcement is a step towards health equity and racial justice. Again, the science is crystal clear: menthol cigarette marketing, such as advertisements and price promotions, targets communities of color, including the African American community.\textsuperscript{9,10} For more than 50 years, the tobacco industry has targeted the African American community, including enlisting African American celebrities to promote menthol cigarettes, and placing more advertisements for menthol cigarettes brands like Kool and Newport in predominantly African American neighborhoods and African American-owned media. A recent study conducted in Los Angeles County showed that storefront ads and cheaper prices for menthol cigarettes were more common in neighborhoods with more African American residents.\textsuperscript{11} As a result, in surveys, 80 percent of African American smokers report smoking menthol cigarettes.\textsuperscript{12}

Moreover, there is a long history of targeted marketing to other communities of color, including campaigns geared specifically to increase Hispanic/Latinx and youth smokers, particularly through menthol.\textsuperscript{2} The tobacco industry continued the trend by targeting our communities with large and small flavored cigars that have fewer restrictions than cigarettes.\textsuperscript{11} These products are just as harmful as cigarettes, yet are widely available in appealing flavors, and sold in singles for less than $1. Popular flavored small cigar brands include Swisher Sweets, Black & Mild, and Backwoods.

4. MENTHOLS ARE A GATEWAY FOR SMOKING AMONG YOUTH

The tobacco industry uses flavored tobacco as a highly effective strategy to attract new young smokers. Evidence shows that teenagers experimenting with smoking are more likely to smoke when tobacco products are flavored, particularly menthol and mint.\textsuperscript{12} Menthol flavor decreases the harsh effects of smoking, making it easier for smokers, including young smokers, to enjoy smoking.\textsuperscript{5} Evidence shows that youth who start using tobacco start with mint/menthol.\textsuperscript{13,14} Over 50% of youth smoke menthol cigarettes and over 90% of African American smokers reported using menthols when they first started smoking.\textsuperscript{9}

In addition to its role as a gateway for smoking, menthols may also slow the progress we’ve made in curbing youth smoking. Youth smoking for non-menthol cigarettes is decreasing, but that decrease is not seen in youth use of menthol cigarettes. Indeed, some research has documented an increase in menthol cigarette use among youth.\textsuperscript{15} Further, cigars are just as popular as cigarettes, if not more.\textsuperscript{16} In this regard, it is clear that banning menthols and flavored cigars is key to curbing youth smoking and preventing a generation from suffering tobacco-related diseases and death.

WHAT COMMUNITIES NEED TO DO NOW:

1. DISSEMINATE THE INFORMATION:

A federal ban on menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars will reduce commercial tobacco use, disease, and death through cessation and prevention of youth use. Educate communities on the FDA’s recent announcement by widely distributing this flyer. Post it on your social media platforms, and print and post it in your buildings, and other community locations.
Q: Is the proposed FDA menthol ban just to discriminate against communities of color?
A: No. The proposed FDA ban came from a citizen petition. It originated from a grassroots movement led by leaders of color and based on scientific evidence that communities of color, especially the African American community, are disproportionately targeted by menthol marketing and as a result, are far more likely to smoke menthol cigarettes. Menthol cigarettes increase the addictive nature of nicotine, which makes it harder for menthol users to quit smoking. Dr. Phillip Gardiner, Researcher and Founding Member of the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council stated, “Part of what I try and get across to people is that the use of tobacco products by African Americans is furthering their oppression here in the United States, and that if we can get off of this, it puts us in a much healthier position to take up struggles, whether it is for greater affirmative action, or equal rights, or even getting a job.”

Q: Isn’t the menthol issue mainly relevant to the African American community?
A: No. Most youth who start using commercial tobacco begin with menthol. Over 50% of youth and 80% of African American youth experimenting with tobacco products report using flavored tobacco, particularly menthol. Moreover, other communities of color are targeted by menthol marketing, including Asian Americans (AA) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (NHPI). One study reported that over 50% of Californian AA and NHPI smoked menthol cigarettes. Additional research demonstrates that menthol is also more common among women, low income, Hispanic/Latinx, and/or LGBTQA+ communities. Menthol is a health equity issue and is relevant to all communities.

Q: Will the ban allow police to stop and cite people who smoke menthol cigarettes?
A: No. This ban is not an enforcement against individuals purchasing, possessing, or using menthol cigarettes. The FDA or law enforcement has no power to criminalize against purchase, possession, or use. This ban would focus on commercial tobacco retailer enforcement, as well as production of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars.

REFERENCES: For a full list of references please visit https://ncpc.ucmerced.edu/resources/flavored-tobacco-info
REFERENCES


5. Ahijevych, K., & Garrett, B. E. The role of menthol in cigarettes as a reinforcer of smoking behavior. Nicotine & Tobacco Research, 2010; 12(suppl_2), S110-S116.


