



Menthol Prohibition: Frequently Asked Questions

Are menthol cigarettes more dangerous than regular cigarettes?

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Menthol cigarettes are not less harmful. They are just as dangerous as non-menthol cigarettes.”¹
- A survival analysis of menthol vs. nonmenthol smokers conducted by the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Center for Tobacco products found “evidence of lower lung cancer mortality risk among menthol smokers compared with nonmenthol smokers at ages 50 and over in the U.S. population.”²
- They also found, “All-cause mortality net of lung cancer mortality did not differ for menthol and nonmenthol smokers.”
- Similar results were observed in a prospective study of 85,806 people published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute. The authors concluded menthol cigarettes are no more harmful than nonmenthol cigarettes.³
- “I don’t think there is enough scientific evidence to justify a ban of menthol cigarettes in comparison with nonmenthol cigarettes,” said study author William J. Blot, Ph.D.
- The reduced lung cancer risk observed in menthol smokers is most likely due to patterns of use, such as fewer cigarettes smoked.

Are menthol cigarettes a unique and pressing threat to youth?

- Youth menthol smoking has declined continuously since the early 2000s. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), menthol smoking was 2.5% in 2014 compared to nonmenthol smoking at 2.2%, a statistically insignificant difference.⁴ In 2004, youth menthol smoking was 4.6%.
- In 2017, according to the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), nonmenthol cigarettes were more popular than menthol cigarettes, with 48.6% of youth who smoke using menthol compared to 51.4% using regular tobacco cigarettes.⁵
- The latest figures from the NSDUH do not show a breakdown of menthol vs. nonmenthol smoking but they do show the lowest smoking rate on record with just 2.7% of adolescents aged 12-17 smoking cigarettes at least once in the past 30-days in 2018.⁶

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- A peer-reviewed data analysis soon to be released by Reason Foundation shows states with higher rates of menthol cigarette consumption relative to the entire cigarette market have lower rates of smoking for both adults and youth.
- Additionally, while menthol cigarette distribution and popularity relative to the entire cigarette market increased during the study period (2008-2017), child use of menthol cigarettes to relative regular cigarettes fell.
- If present trends continue, youth use of menthol cigarettes will be at or near zero within five years or less.

What are the consequences of banning menthol cigarettes?

- Prohibition can end the legal supply of a product but cannot eliminate its demand. As illegal suppliers of marijuana lose profits to the legal market there will be a strong incentive for criminal networks to supply an addictive product to a market of several million customers.
- As African Americans who smoke disproportionately use menthol cigarettes, the demand for illicit cigarettes will be concentrated in these communities and so, therefore, will law enforcement action.
- Banning menthol cigarettes while simultaneously banning flavored e-cigarettes will spark an illicit market for menthol cigarettes. Those who don't wish to procure menthol cigarettes on the black market will likely switch to regular cigarettes.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Menthol and Menthol Cigarettes." Office on Smoking and Health. August 2019. https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/tobacco_industry/menthol-cigarettes/index.html
2. Rostron, Brian Ph.D. "Lung Cancer Mortality Risk for U.S. Menthol Cigarette Smokers." Nicotine and Tobacco Research. Volume 14, Issue 10. October 2012. <https://academic.oup.com/ntr/article/14/10/1140/1749051#25909592>
3. Blott, William J. et al. "Lung cancer risk among smokers of menthol cigarettes." Journal of the National Cancer Institute. Volume 103, Issue 10. May 2011. <https://academic.oup.com/jnci/article/103/10/NP/2516599>
4. Truth Initiative. "Menthol: Facts, stats, and regulations." Fact Sheet. August 2018. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/traditional-tobacco-products/menthol-facts-stats-and-regulations#targetText=In%202014%2C%20the%20prevalence%20of,among%20a%20middle%20school%20students>.
5. Dai, Hongying. "Changes in Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among Current Youth Tobacco Users in the United States, 2014-2017." JAMA Pediatrics. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2720081>
6. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health." HHS Publication No. PEP19-5068, NSDUH Series H-54. 2019. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-annual-national-report>

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