

OVERVIEW

- Menthol is a chemical compound extracted from the peppermint or corn mint plant or created synthetically. It reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke due to its characteristic cooling effects on the mouth and throat.^{1,2}
- Although most cigarettes contain some menthol, certain brands use menthol in greater quantities as a characterizing flavor, and market and advertise those brands as “menthol.” Menthol was first added to cigarettes in the 1920s and 1930s, and became widespread in the 1950s and 1960s.^{1,3,4}
- The 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act’s ban on the use of characterizing flavors in cigarettes did not include menthol, although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does have the authority to implement a ban through regulations. There are currently no restrictions on characterizing flavors, including menthol, in other tobacco products, such as little cigars, cigarillos, and smokeless tobacco.⁵

PREVALENCE AND MARKET SHARE

- Menthol cigarettes made up 32.0% of the cigarette market in the U.S. in 2011, up from 22.0% in 2010.⁶
- From 2000 to 2011, the decline in cigarette consumption was greater among non-menthol cigarettes (37% decline) than for menthol cigarettes (20% decline). 89% of the total decline in cigarette consumption is attributed to non-menthol cigarettes.⁷
- In 2010, there were an estimated 20 million menthol cigarette smokers in the U.S.⁸
- The prevalence of menthol cigarette use is higher in youth than young adults and adults.
 - From 2008 to 2010, 56.7% of youth smokers smoked menthol cigarettes, which compares with an overall menthol cigarette prevalence of 35.2% among youth and adult smokers.⁹
- A recent nationally representative study found that among youth and young adults, non-menthol cigarette prevalence declined from 2004 to 2010. By contrast, menthol cigarette prevalence remained constant among youth and increased among young adults over this period.⁹
- Women are 1.6 times more likely than men to smoke menthols.¹⁰

AFRICAN AMERICAN MENTHOL USE

- Almost one in five (19.1%) African Americans smoke menthol cigarettes.⁸
- Among African Americans who smoke, 84.5% use menthols, compared to 26.9% of White and 33.6% of Asian American smokers.⁸
- African American smokers are nearly 11 times more likely to use menthol than White smokers.¹⁰

MENTHOL: A STARTER PRODUCT FOR YOUTH

- Menthol reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke, which appeals to young, inexperienced smokers.^{1,11,12}

- Data from nationally representative samples show that the youngest age groups use menthol at the highest rates.^{9,13}
 - From 2008 to 2010, 56.7% of teenage smokers (aged 12 to 17) smoked menthol cigarettes, compared to 45.0% of 18 to 25 year-old smokers and 34.5% of smokers aged 26 to 34.⁹
 - Data combined for years 2004, 2006, and 2009 of the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS) showed that 49.4% of middle school current smokers and 44.9% of high school current smokers reported smoking mentholated cigarettes.¹³
- Youth who have recently started smoking are significantly more likely to use menthol cigarettes than youth who have smoked longer than one year.^{8,14,15}
- Young people are likely to remain with their “starter” type of cigarette over time.^{16,17}
- Longitudinal studies show that initiation with menthol cigarettes facilitates progression to established cigarette use in young smokers.^{16,18}
- The proportion of smokers using menthol cigarettes is increasing. While use of non-menthol cigarettes decreased from 2004 to 2010, the percentage of youth (12 to 17 year-olds) who use menthol cigarettes remained constant and the percentage of young adults (18 to 25 year-olds) who use menthol cigarettes increased.^{8,9}

INDUSTRY TARGETING AND MANIPULATION

- The tobacco industry has a well-documented history of developing and marketing mentholated brands to racial and ethnic minorities and youth.^{12,19-22}
- Evidence from tobacco industry documents shows that the industry studied smokers’ menthol preferences and manipulated menthol levels to appeal to a variety of smokers, including adolescents and young adults.^{11,12,19,23}
- Evidence from tobacco industry documents also shows that tobacco companies specifically targeted African Americans with menthol cigarette advertising.^{22,24-26}
- A recent review found that menthol marketing is higher in publications and venues that target African American audiences.²⁷
- Numerous studies show targeted marketing of menthol cigarettes at the point-of-sale in African American communities throughout the U.S.²⁸⁻³²

ADDICTION AND QUITTING

- Menthol flavoring contributes to addiction in youth smokers.^{1,33,34}
- Youth who smoke menthol cigarettes are significantly more likely to show signs of nicotine addiction than their peers who smoke non-menthol brands.^{15,16,35-37}
- Adult menthol smokers report shorter time to first cigarette after waking than non-menthol smokers. Time to first cigarette is an important measure of nicotine addiction.³⁸⁻⁴⁰
- Despite some variation in the findings across studies of cessation among menthol smokers,⁴¹⁻⁴⁴ the weight of the scientific evidence shows that adult menthol smokers are less likely than non-menthol smokers to successfully quit smoking⁴⁵⁻⁵³ despite increased quit intentions⁵⁰ and quit attempts.^{47,50,51} Studies show significantly reduced cessation among African-American^{45,46} and Hispanic menthol smokers compared to non-menthol smokers.⁴⁶

EFFECTS OF A POSSIBLE MENTHOL BAN

- One in five Americans agree that menthol flavoring in cigarettes should be banned.⁵⁴
- Support for the ban of menthol cigarettes is highest among Hispanics (36.4%), African Americans (29.0%), never smokers (26.8%), and respondents with less than a high school education (28.8%).⁵⁴
- If menthol cigarettes were banned, 38.9% of all menthol smokers, 44.5% of African American menthol smokers, and 64.6% of young adult menthol smokers report they would try to quit smoking.^{54,55}
- If a menthol ban had gone into effect in 2011, researchers estimate conservatively that over 320,000 smoking-attributable deaths would be averted by 2050, almost a third of them among African Americans.⁵⁶

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⁵ H.R. 1256--111th Congress: Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act. 2009; <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hr1256>. Accessed April 2, 2012.

⁶ Federal Trade Commission. Federal Trade Commission cigarette report for 2011. Washington, DC 2013.

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