



## IMPACT OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES ON YOUTH SMOKING INITIATION AND HEALTH DISPARITIES

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In 2009, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act prohibited cigarettes with specific characterizing flavors in the US.<sup>1</sup> However, this legislation left menthol cigarettes on the market, which continue to pose a tremendous public health threat. A 2013 report from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on the health impact of menthol cigarettes determined that **menthol cigarettes lead to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction and decreased success in quitting smoking.**<sup>2</sup> The FDA's Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee (TPSAC) projected that by 2020, about 17,000 premature deaths will be attributable to menthol cigarettes and about 2.3 million people will have started smoking because of menthol cigarettes.<sup>3</sup> Today, communities across the country, with the support of groups like the NAACP and National Urban League, are taking action to prohibit the sale of menthol cigarettes.

### Menthol Cigarettes Are Popular Among Youth

The tobacco companies know that almost all new smokers begin their addiction as kids, but they also know that to novice smokers, tobacco can be harsh and unappealing. Menthol cools and numbs the throat, reduces the harshness of tobacco smoke, and makes menthol cigarettes more appealing to youth who are starting to smoke. As a result, the availability of menthol cigarettes increase the number of kids who experiment with cigarettes and who become regular smokers.<sup>4</sup> Young people who initiate using menthol cigarettes are more likely to become addicted and to become long-term daily smokers.<sup>5</sup>

- Youth smokers are more likely to use menthol cigarettes than any other age group. Over half (54 percent) of youth smokers ages 12-17 use menthol cigarettes, compared to less than one-third of smokers ages 35 and older.<sup>6</sup>
- Prevalence of menthol use is even higher among African American youth: seven out of ten African-American youth smokers smoke menthol cigarettes.<sup>7</sup>

### Menthol Increases Addiction and Makes it Harder for Smokers to Quit

While the tobacco industry initially marketed menthol cigarettes as safer and healthier cigarettes because of their cooling properties and reduced throat irritability, this could not be further from the truth.<sup>8</sup> In fact, menthol cigarettes are associated with increased nicotine dependence and reduced success in smoking cessation.<sup>9</sup> While smoking rates have declined overall in recent years, use of menthol cigarettes has increased significantly.<sup>10</sup> In 2017, menthol cigarettes comprised 36 percent of the national market, the highest proportion on record since the Federal Trade Commission began collecting this data in 1963.<sup>11</sup>

### Use of Menthol Cigarettes Leads to Health Disparities

Prevalence of menthol cigarette use is highest among African Americans - 85 percent of all African-American smokers smoke menthol cigarettes, compared to 29 percent of Whites.<sup>12</sup> African Americans generally have higher levels of nicotine dependence and lower cessation success because of their preference for mentholated cigarettes.<sup>13</sup> As a result, African Americans suffer the greatest burden of tobacco-related mortality of any racial or ethnic group in the United States. Each year, approximately 45,000 African Americans die from a smoking-caused illness.<sup>14</sup> Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in both African-American men and women, but it kills more African Americans than any other type of cancer.<sup>15</sup> TPSAC estimated that by 2020, 4,700 excess deaths in the African American community will be attributable to menthol cigarettes, and over 460,000 African Americans will have started smoking because of menthol cigarettes.<sup>16</sup>

### The Tobacco Industry Targets Minorities and Youth with Menthol Cigarette Marketing

The greater popularity of menthol cigarettes among African Americans, youth, and other minorities is a direct result of a decades-long marketing campaign by the tobacco industry. Dating back to the 1950s, the tobacco industry has targeted these communities with marketing for menthol cigarettes through sponsorship of

community and music events, targeted magazine advertising, youthful imagery, and marketing in the retail environment.<sup>17</sup>

Today, menthol cigarettes continue to be heavily advertised, widely available, and priced cheaper in certain African-American communities, making them more appealing, particularly to price-sensitive youth. African-American neighborhoods have a disproportionate number of tobacco retailers, pervasive tobacco marketing, and in particular, more marketing of menthol products.<sup>18</sup>

### **Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, May 24, 2019 / Laura Bach**

<sup>1</sup> See U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Flavored Tobacco webpage at

<http://www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/FlavoredTobacco/default.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> FDA. *Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes* (2013)

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/ScienceResearch/SpecialTopics/PeerReviewofScientificInformationandAssessments/UCM361598.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> TPSAC, Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, July 21, 2011

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AdvisoryCommittees/CommitteesMeetingMaterials/TobaccoProductsScientificAdvisoryCommittee/UCM269697.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> FDA. *Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes* (2013).

<sup>5</sup> TPSAC, FDA, "Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Villanti, A., et al., "Changes in the prevalence and correlates of menthol cigarette use in the USA, 2004–2014," *Tobacco Control*, published online October 20, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Villanti, A., et al., "Changes in the prevalence and correlates of menthol cigarette use in the USA, 2004–2014," *Tobacco Control*, published online October 20, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, SJ, et al., "Marketing of menthol cigarette and consumer perceptions: a review of tobacco industry documents," *Tobacco Control*, 20(Suppl 2): ii20-ii28, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> TPSAC, Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, July 21, 2011

<sup>10</sup> Giovino, GA, et al., "Differential trends in cigarette smoking in the USA: is menthol slowing progress?" *Tobacco Control*, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), *Cigarette Report for 2017*, 2019, [https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/federal-trade-commission-cigarette-report-2017-federal-trade-commission-smokeless-tobacco-report/ftc\\_cigarette\\_report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/federal-trade-commission-cigarette-report-2017-federal-trade-commission-smokeless-tobacco-report/ftc_cigarette_report_2017.pdf) [data for top 5 manufacturers only].

<sup>12</sup> Villanti, A., et al., "Changes in the prevalence and correlates of menthol cigarette use in the USA, 2004–2014," *Tobacco Control*, published online October 20, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> FDA, "Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol Versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes," 2013;

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<sup>14</sup> HHS, "Tobacco Use Among US Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups—African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics: A Report of the Surgeon General," 1998,

[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/1998/complete\\_report/pdfs/complete\\_report.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/1998/complete_report/pdfs/complete_report.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> American Cancer Society, "Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans, 2016-2018," 2016,

<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@editorial/documents/document/acspc-047403.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee, FDA, "Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> TPSAC, Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, July 21, 2011; Hafez, N. & Ling, P.M.

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<sup>18</sup> Lee, JGL, et al., "A Systematic Review of Neighborhood Disparities in Point-of-Sale Tobacco Marketing," *American Journal of Public Health*,

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