

FDA NEWS RELEASE

FDA Commits to Evidence-Based Actions Aimed at Saving Lives and Preventing Future Generations of Smokers

Efforts to ban menthol cigarettes, ban flavored cigars build on previous flavor ban and mark significant steps to reduce addiction and youth experimentation, improve quitting, and address health disparities

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Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced it is committing to advancing two tobacco product standards to significantly reduce disease and death from using combusted tobacco products, the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. The FDA is working toward issuing proposed product standards within the next year to ban menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes and ban all characterizing flavors (including menthol) in cigars; the authority to adopt product standards is one of the most powerful tobacco regulatory tools Congress gave the agency. This decision is based on clear science and evidence establishing the addictiveness and harm of these products and builds on important, previous actions that banned other flavored cigarettes in 2009.

“Banning menthol—the last allowable flavor—in cigarettes and banning all flavors in cigars will help save lives, particularly among those disproportionately affected by these deadly products. With these actions, the FDA will help significantly reduce youth initiation, increase the chances of smoking cessation among current smokers, and address health disparities experienced by communities of color, low-income populations, and LGBTQ+ individuals, all of whom are far more likely to use these tobacco products,” said Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, M.D. **“Together, these actions represent powerful, science-based approaches that will have an extraordinary public health impact. Armed with strong scientific evidence, and with full support from the [Administration](#), we believe these actions will launch us on a trajectory toward ending tobacco-related disease and death in the U.S.”**

The agency is taking urgent action to reduce tobacco addiction and curb deaths. There is strong evidence that a menthol ban will help people quit. Studies show that menthol increases the appeal of tobacco and facilitates progression to regular smoking, particularly among youth and young adults. Menthol masks unpleasant flavors and harshness of tobacco products, making them easier to start using. Tobacco products with menthol can also be more addictive and harder to quit by enhancing the effects of nicotine. One [study](#)[External Link Disclaimer](#) suggests that banning menthol cigarettes in the U.S. would lead an additional 923,000 smokers to quit, including 230,000 African Americans in the first 13 to 17 months after a ban goes into effect. An

earlier [study](#)[External Link Disclaimer](#) projected that about 633,000 deaths would be averted, including about 237,000 deaths averted for African Americans.

“For far too long, certain populations, including African Americans, have been targeted, and disproportionately impacted by tobacco use. Despite the tremendous progress we’ve made in getting people to stop smoking over the past 55 years, that progress hasn’t been experienced by everyone equally,” said Mitch Zeller, J.D., director of the FDA’s Center for Tobacco Products. **“These flavor standards would reduce cigarette and cigar initiation and use, reduce health disparities, and promote health equity by addressing a significant and disparate source of harm. Taken together, these policies will help save lives and improve the public health of our country as we confront the leading cause of preventable disease and death.”**

If implemented, the FDA’s enforcement of any ban on menthol cigarettes and all flavored cigars will only address manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, importers and retailers. The FDA cannot and will not enforce against individual consumer possession or use of menthol cigarettes or any tobacco product. The FDA will work to make sure that any unlawful tobacco products do not make their way onto the market.

These actions are an important opportunity to achieve significant, meaningful public health gains and advance health equity. The FDA is working expeditiously on the two issues, and the next step will be for the agency to publish proposed rules in the Federal Register allowing an opportunity for public comment.

The agency also recognizes the importance of ensuring broad and equitable access to all the tools and resources that can help currently addicted smokers seeking to quit, including those who smoke menthol cigarettes and would be impacted by these public health measures. The FDA will work with partners in other federal agencies to make sure the support is there for those who are trying to quit. Smokers interested in quitting today should visit smokefree.gov or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to learn about cessation services available in their state.

The FDA also remains focused on its regulatory oversight of e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). The Center for Tobacco Products recently [provided an update](#) on its ongoing work of conducting the premarket review of ENDS and other tobacco product applications, and has issued warning letters to ENDS product manufacturers and retailers who continue to sell products that are illegally on the market. The FDA has also made a significant investment in a multimedia e-cigarette public education campaign. The campaign targets nearly 10.7 million youth aged 12-17 who have ever used e-cigarettes or are open to trying them, and highlights information about the potential risks of e-cigarette use.

Background on Today’s Actions

Menthol Product Standard

Today, the FDA granted a citizen petition requesting that the agency pursue rulemaking to prohibit menthol in cigarettes, affirming its commitment to proposing such a product standard.

The 2009 Tobacco Control Act (TCA) did not include menthol in its ban on characterizing flavors in cigarettes, leaving menthol cigarettes as the only flavored combusted cigarettes still marketed in the U.S. The law instructed the FDA to further consider the issue of menthol in cigarettes.

Since then, the FDA sought input from an [independent advisory committee as required by the TCA External Link Disclaimer](#), and further demonstrated its interest by issuing an [Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#), undertaking an [independent evaluation](#) and supporting broader research efforts—all to better understand the differences between menthol and non-menthol cigarettes and the impact of menthol on population health.

In the U.S., it is estimated that there are nearly 18.6 million current smokers of menthol cigarettes. But use of menthol cigarettes among smokers is not uniform: out of all Black smokers, nearly 85% smoke menthol cigarettes, compared to 30% of White smokers who smoke menthols. In addition, among youth, from 2011 to 2018, declines in menthol cigarette use were observed among non-Hispanic White youth but not among non-Hispanic Black or Hispanic youth.

Cigar Flavor Product Standard

After the 2009 statutory ban on flavors in cigarettes other than menthol, use of flavored cigars increased dramatically, suggesting that the public health goals of the flavored cigarette ban may have been undermined by continued availability of these flavored cigars.

Flavored mass-produced cigars and cigarillos are combusted tobacco products that can closely resemble cigarettes, pose many of the same public health problems, and are disproportionately popular among youth and other populations. In 2020, non-Hispanic Black high school students reported past 30-day cigar smoking at levels twice as high as their White counterparts.

Nearly 74% of youth aged 12-17 who use cigars say they smoke cigars because they come in flavors they enjoy. Among youth who have ever tried a cigar, 68% of cigarillo users and 56% of filtered cigar users report that their first cigar was a flavored product. Moreover, in 2020, more young people tried a cigar every day than tried a cigarette.

Related Information

- [Statement by HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra on FDA Tobacco Actions on Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars](#)

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