

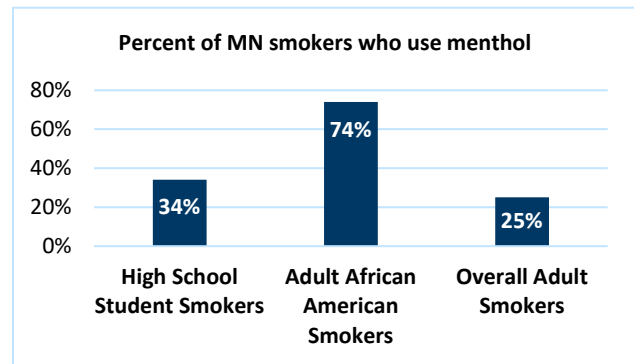
Menthol Flavored Tobacco Products

Menthol is a flavor additive commonly used in cigarettes and other tobacco products. Federal law currently prohibits the manufacture and sale of flavored cigarettes, with the exception of menthol.^[1]

Menthol cigarette use is high among Minnesota youth and African Americans.

One in three Minnesota high school smokers use menthol;^[2] overall 25 percent of adult smokers use menthol.^[3]

From 2004 to 2014, as the use of non-menthol cigarettes by youth and young adults declined, the use of menthol cigarettes among these groups increased or remained constant.^[4] This disparate progress in reducing youth smoking rates is likely perpetuated by the sale and marketing of menthol cigarettes.^[5]



Additionally, almost one in four Minnesota African-Americans are current smokers (compared to 14.4 percent of adults statewide), with the vast majority using menthol.^[6] While menthol use is high in many communities, use by African-Americans is particularly concerning as they are 30-36 percent more likely to die of lung cancer than non-Latino whites;^[7] they are also 53 percent more likely to die of heart disease.^[8]

Menthol tobacco products are serious public health threat.

Menthol makes smoking easier and more attractive for youth.

Menthol makes experimentation easier because it can mask irritation from smoking. It has a minty taste and smell and produces cooling and numbing sensations that reduce the harshness of cigarette smoke.^[9-16] This may encourage youth to keep smoking when they would otherwise stop.^[9]

The use of characterizing flavors began in the 1970s to make it easier for new smokers to start, and to become regular smokers more easily.^[17-19]



Menthol intensifies addiction, especially for young smokers.

Youth who smoke menthol cigarettes are more dependent on cigarettes and show stronger addiction to nicotine than those who smoke non-menthol cigarettes.^[9, 10, 15, 20-22] Additionally, youth who start smoking with menthol cigarettes are more likely to transition to regular smoking than those who start with non-menthol cigarettes.^[9, 22]



Menthol makes it harder for smokers to quit for good.

A large number of studies show that menthol users have a higher nicotine dependence and smoking urge.^[14] Thus, menthol users have a harder time quitting than non-menthol users.^[23, 24] This finding is stronger among African-American and other minority populations than among white smokers,^[25-27] despite African-American menthol users expressing greater confidence in their ability to quit than non-menthol users.^[28]

Women who smoke menthol cigarettes before a pregnancy are also more likely to start smoking again after the pregnancy than those who smoke non-menthol cigarettes.^[29]

Industry marketing practices target specific populations.

Menthol cigarette marketing practices are targeted more toward younger people and African-Americans than older adults and other racial or ethnic groups.^[9, 10, 30-32] Menthol cigarette marketing has consistently targeted minority and low-income communities.^[33-36] This strategy results in higher smoking rates among these groups.^[9, 10, 37]

Advertising is a strong driver of brand preference, especially among youth, and it is likely that price discounts, promotions, product placement, and geographic location have been used to drive menthol cigarette preference among youth and young adults as well as the African-American community.^[9, 10]

Communities are addressing menthol tobacco use.

The African American Leadership Forum – in partnership with Hennepin County Public Health, Bloomington Public Health, Minneapolis Health Department and St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health – recently surveyed residents to learn about menthol tobacco use in local communities.

It was conducted as part of the Menthol Cigarette Intervention Grant, required by the Minnesota Legislature, to deepen understanding of African American use patterns and perceptions and attitudes toward menthol tobacco, and it will serve as a basis for community engagement and education moving forward.

Survey results reinforce the need to educate and raise awareness on the harms of menthol tobacco use, and they also show that a majority of African American community members support new laws to reduce tobacco's harm.

Proven tobacco control policies and evidenced-based strategies are necessary to prevent all forms of tobacco use, including flavored tobacco products.^[38] Effective strategies include price increases as well as restricting youth access to tobacco products and exposure to tobacco product marketing.^[39] The Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee of the Food and Drug Administration states that “removal of menthol cigarettes from the marketplace would benefit public health in the United States.”^[9]

Learn more at www.health.mn.gov/menthol.

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