

Opportunities to Tackle Menthol in Tobacco

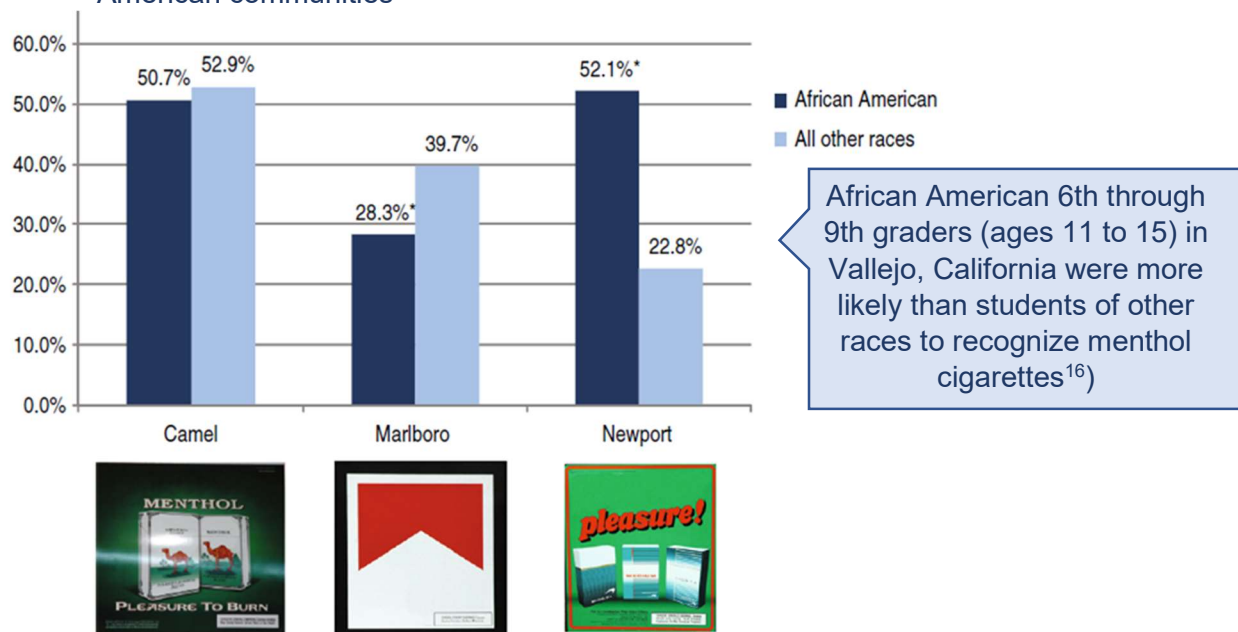
Background

Menthol is an additive in cigarettes and other tobacco products. It creates a cooling effect which reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke and suppresses coughing.¹ As summarized in one study, “menthol has been shown to increase regular cigarette smoking and nicotine dependence, and decrease success in smoking cessation”² across numerous studies.³⁻⁵ Menthol cigarette use is also associated with increased initiation among youth. Menthol-smoking youth smoke more cigarettes than those who smoke non-menthol cigarettes and are more likely to state an intention to continue smoking.^{4,6-10}

Menthol Cigarettes Disproportionately Harm Marginalized Communities

The African American^{7,10-12} and LGBTQ communities are particularly at risk for targeted menthol ads and have a correspondingly higher rate of use.^{10,13} Additionally, mental health conditions have been associated with higher use of menthol products.^{14,15}

- Recognition of menthol brands is higher among African American children than children of all other races, reflecting greater youth exposure to menthol advertisements in African American communities



- More than 80% of African Americans who smoke use menthol cigarettes⁷
- LGBT smokers are over 30% more likely to report typically smoking menthol cigarettes compared to heterosexual/straight smokers¹³
- Youth with anxiety or depression are more likely to smoke menthol cigarettes “above and beyond” the known relationship between mental health and smoking¹⁴
- In Michigan, 66% of African American smokers started smoking with menthol cigarettes (regardless of age, sexual orientation, education, income, or other factors)¹⁷

Given the disproportionate impact that menthol cigarettes have on public health, there is a crucial need for policy solutions to this persistent threat.

***Opportunities for Policy Change:
What States and Localities Can Do***

Due to accumulated evidence that menthol increases the health risks posed by cigarettes, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced its intention to ban menthol cigarettes and all flavored cigars in April 2021.¹⁸ Many other countries, as well as 20 states and localities in the United States, have banned menthol cigarettes.¹⁹



The most comprehensive policy option is a ban on the use of menthol in all combustible tobacco products. If a ban is implemented, retailer adherence to the law will be key in ensuring effective implementation of the new policy.²⁰ This can be accomplished through education and communication with retailers as well as clear policy language without exceptions or loopholes. While the FDA finalizes the menthol ban at the federal level, work can still be done at the local or state level to reduce availability of products as it is uncertain when the ban will go into effect or what products will be covered.

Research Predicts a Large Benefit from Banning Menthol Cigarettes

- A menthol ban has been projected to reduce smoking overall by 9.7% and African American smoking rates by 24.8% over a 40-year period.²¹
- Bans have the greatest support in communities with the highest use of menthol cigarettes, including the African American and Hispanic communities, and among individuals with less than a high school education.²²
- In Canada, where menthol tobacco products have been banned since 2017, cessation attempts increased in the year following implementation, with 63% of daily menthol smokers in the study reporting a quit attempt since the ban and 24% successfully quitting at the time of follow-up (1 year later).²³ A ban in the US may also reduce the number of youth who use cigarettes.²⁴



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