



## Washtenaw County Health Department

### For Immediate Release

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### **Menthol and Flavored Tobacco Products Harming Health**

*Menthol and flavored tobacco products make it easier to start using and harder to quit*

YPSILANTI, Mich., June 8, 2022 – The Washtenaw County Health Department is working to share information about the harms of menthol and other flavored tobacco products with a goal of building community support for banning flavors, reducing addiction, and saving lives.

Menthol has a minty flavor that creates a cooling sensation when used. Menthol makes it easier to inhale deeply, which leads to a bigger dose of nicotine and a stronger potential for addiction. The tobacco industry uses menthol and other flavored products to lure new users into tobacco addiction. As a result, most young people start with a flavored product.

“Everyone deserves a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. The tobacco industry knows menthol and flavors increase addiction and hurt health, but they continue to push these products to make more money, especially in communities of color and with young people,” says Amanda Ng, Health Promotion Coordinator with the Washtenaw County Health Department.

Tobacco companies use marketing and products like menthol to increase addiction, and they target some communities more than others. We see these disparities in Washtenaw County, where our [smoking rate](#) for African American residents is higher than our county’s smoking rate (17% among African Americans compared to 11% overall). As a result of this targeted marketing, African Americans suffer the greatest burden of tobacco-related death and disease of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.

In addition, young people prefer flavored tobacco, including menthol, which has increased their tobacco use rates. A majority (85%) of youth e-cigarette users [report](#) using flavored products. [Nearly half](#) of young people who have ever smoked started with menthol cigarettes, and young people who start with menthols are [more likely](#) to become addicted.

### **What can be done**

The Washtenaw County Health Department and health policy experts recommend a comprehensive menthol and flavor ban to prevent further harm.

“Tobacco companies shouldn’t be allowed to make their products more addictive and more deadly. Other flavored cigarettes were banned years ago, but the flavor that causes the most harm in Black communities was left out. Regulating the commercial tobacco industry saves lives – menthol and flavor bans are an important next step in preventing disease and protecting public health,” continues Ng.

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The push to take menthol off the shelves is led by leaders from organizations like the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council, Center for Black Health and Equity, and others who have been calling for more attention to this issue for decades. When these highly addictive products are less convenient for people to get, fewer people will start using. Menthol products make it easier to use and easier to get addicted, so banning menthol will reduce addiction. A ban will also make it easier for people to quit if they want to. Research [estimates](#) that a menthol ban would save 650,000 lives over the next 40 years.

### **Current status of menthol bans**

On April 29, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed [product standards](#) to prohibit menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes and to prohibit all characterizing flavors (other than tobacco) in cigars. This would place restrictions on manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, importers, and retailers who manufacture, distribute, or sell such products in the US. It would not make it illegal for adults to have or use these products.

The FDA is accepting public comments through July 5, 2022 and will then make a final decision on these regulations. Public comments can be submitted online [here](#).

The Washtenaw County Health Department supports these proposed product standards, as they will promote health and save lives by restricting the availability of harmful tobacco products. Additionally, the Health Department is currently working as part of the [MI\[END\]THOL campaign](#) to promote education around the tactics used by the tobacco industry to push harmful products like menthol and flavored tobacco. Join our email list (<https://bit.ly/wctobacco>) to receive updates on menthol and flavored tobacco, local initiatives, and opportunities to get involved.

Four states and hundreds of localities [have already passed restrictions](#) on the sale of flavored tobacco products. Although the laws vary, at least 150 of these communities restrict the sale of menthol cigarettes, in addition to other flavored tobacco products.

### **Quit resources**

The Michigan Tobacco Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW or 1-800-784-8669) is an evidence-based service that helps smokers access quit aids, counseling, and other resources. The service is available 24/7 in multiple languages. Individual tobacco users can contact the Quitline directly at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or enroll online at <https://michigan.quitlogix.org/>.

The My Life My Quit program is designed specifically for young people who use tobacco. People under 18 can text 36072 or call 855-891-9989 for free confidential help with quitting smoking or other tobacco products, including e-cigarettes. The My Life My Quit program offers a self-guided [online program](#), interactive text messaging, and text reminders.

### **Washtenaw County Health Department**

The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs.

Local public health information and updates are always available at [www.washtenaw.org/health](http://www.washtenaw.org/health). The Health Department also provides frequent social media updates (@wcpublichealth) and sends regular email updates, sign up at <http://bit.ly/WCHD555>.

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