



ABOUT MENTHOL TOBACCO

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FDA Takes Long-Overdue Step to Improve Black Health

Removing Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars from the Marketplace Will Advance Racial and Health Equity, Especially for Black Minnesotans

MINNEAPOLIS – Today leaders from the Menthol Coalition and Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation thanked the Biden Administration and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for taking the long-overdue step to improve health by introducing a plan to take menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars off the market. Since 2009, menthol has been the only flavored cigarette allowed on the marketplace, which has institutionalized disparities and cost precious lives, especially in the Black community. The tobacco industry for decades has used menthol flavors to racially segment and target customers, especially Black Americans. Clearing the market of menthol cigarettes and all flavored cigars will directly improve the health of Black communities as well as young people and other groups targeted by Big Tobacco.

Since the FDA action could take years and will likely face lawsuits and delays from the tobacco industry, Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation and the Menthol Coalition urge state and local leaders to continue passing policies now to end the sale of menthol and *all* flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, e-cigarettes, chew and flavored cigars. On Monday, the city of Bloomington became Minnesota's 17th community to restrict or end the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products. Ten of those cities, including Bloomington, have completely ended flavored tobacco sales.

"It's easy now to see how Big Tobacco got Black people hooked to menthol cigarettes through decades of relentless targeting," said Gene Nichols, a community advocate and researcher. "Back in the day, the tobacco industry handed out Newports in Black neighborhoods, sponsored events like KOOL Jazz Fest, and blanketed magazines like 'Jet' and 'Ebony' with menthol tobacco ads. Today, Big Tobacco continues to target Black people with price promotions, coupons, ads featuring barbers and Black rappers, and sponsoring Black groups to gain influence in our community. Perhaps most shameful, the tobacco industry has tried to whitewash their actions by claiming that Black Lives Matter – all while they continue to addict our kids and kill our aunts and uncles showing that it's not our lives, it's their profits that matter."

As a result of that marketing, today 85 percent of Black smokers smoke menthols, compared to 29 percent of white smokers. Menthol gives a cooling sensation and masks tobacco's harshness, making it easier to start smoking and harder to quit. The 2020 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey found 33 percent of current youth smokers reported having smoked a menthol cigarette in the past 30 days, versus 27.5 percent of Minnesota adult smokers.

Gene Nichols led a [2016 menthol cigarette engagement survey](#) in the Twin Cities African American community, which found overwhelming support for strong public health policies. "Our study and subsequent polls have found that the vast majority of Black Minnesotans want more government policies to reduce the harm of smoking," Nichols said. "Black Minnesotans want to protect their kids and they wish this awful addiction on nobody." A 2020 [statewide poll](#) found that three quarters (74 percent) of Minnesotans support prohibiting the sale of menthol cigarettes and all flavored tobacco products, including 77 percent of African Americans.

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of more than 60 organizations that share a common goal of reducing youth smoking and ending tobacco's harm for good. The coalition supports ending the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products to ease health disparities and prevent youth tobacco use.

In late December, the Minnesota House Select Committee on Racial Justice issued extensive [policy recommendations](#) to address racial disparities. The committee recommended that Minnesota remove menthol and all flavored tobacco products from the marketplace and invest in tobacco prevention and treatment. The statewide bill to end all flavored tobacco sales ([HF 904/SF1271](#)) did not pass this session, but legislators still have a prime opportunity to invest more tobacco revenues in prevention and treatment efforts. Tobacco prevention funding is urgently needed in 2021, and complements policies to end flavored tobacco sales.

Sustainable funding is an important part of a comprehensive plan to reverse the youth tobacco epidemic and ease tobacco-related health disparities. The Minnesota House, Senate and Walz budget proposals increase investments in tobacco prevention programs and direct the Minnesota Department of Health to emphasize health equity in these programs. Increasing Minnesota's investment from one penny per dollar of tobacco revenue to two or three pennies will reduce addiction, save money and lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic adds urgency to these efforts, since current and former smokers are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. To make matters worse, communities targeted by the tobacco industry, including Black and Indigenous Minnesotans, are some of the hardest hit by COVID-19. All Minnesota residents can access free quitting help through 1-800-QUIT-NOW and [QuitPartnerMN.com](#).

More info:

- [Fact sheet: End the Sale of All Flavored Tobacco Products](#)
- [Fact sheet: Fund Tobacco Prevention and Treatment](#)

About Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of more than 60 organizations that share a common goal of saving Minnesota youth from a lifetime of addiction to tobacco. The coalition supports policies that reduce youth smoking and nicotine addiction, including increasing tobacco prices, ending the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products, and funding tobacco prevention and treatment programs.

Partners include: The African American Leadership Forum, Allina Health, Allina Health | Aetna, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association in Minnesota, Apple Tree Dental, Association for Nonsmokers – Minnesota, Aurora/St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, Becker County Energized, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, A Breath of Hope Lung Foundation, Cancer Legal Care, CentraCare, Children's Defense Fund-MN, Children's Minnesota, ClearWay MinnesotaSM, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio – CLUES, Dodge County Public Health, Education Minnesota, Essentia Health, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare, A Healthier Southwest, HealthPartners, Hennepin Healthcare, Horizon Public Health, Indigenous Peoples Task Force, ISAIAH, JustUs Health, LAAMPP Alumni, Lake Region Healthcare, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota, LPCFC – Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative, March of Dimes, Mayo Clinic, Medica, Meeker McLeod Sibley Community Health Services, Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, Minnesota Association of Community Health Centers, Minnesota Cancer Alliance, Minnesota Council of Health Plans, MHA – Minnesota Hospital Association, Minnesota Medical Association, Minnesota Nurses Association, Minnesota Oral Health Coalition, Minnesota Public Health Association, MNAAP – Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, ModelCities, NAMI Minnesota, North Memorial Health, NorthPoint Health & Wellness, Olmsted Medical Center, Open Cities Health Center, Parents Against Vaping e-cigarettes (PAVe), PartnerSHIP 4 Health, Perham Health & Living, Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, ShiftMN, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Steele County Public Health, Tobacco-Free Alliance, Twin Cities Medical Society, UCare, Vision In Living Life – Change is Possible, WellShare International and Zumbro Valley Medical Society. Find out more at: [smokefreegenmn.org](#).

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