Flavored Tobacco Products Attract Kids

Tobacco companies have a long history of developing and marketing flavored tobacco products as "starter" products that attract kids.[1] Flavored tobacco products play a key role in enticing new users—primarily youth—to a lifetime of addiction. Restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products will protect kids, save lives and advance health equity.

"The tobacco industry has designed, engineered, and marketed menthol cigarettes and other tobacco products that deliver multisensory flavor experiences which increase the likelihood of tobacco initiation, addiction, and sustained use."[2] - U.S. Surgeon General

Flavored Tobacco Products are on the Rise

- E-cigarettes are available in a wide range of kid-friendly flavors like cotton candy, pink lemonade, bubblegum, mango, mint and menthol. About 80% of e-cigarette sales are for flavored products.[3] The FDA has authorized 45 e-cigarette products for sale in the US, including ten flavored products. However, there are thousands of illegal, flavored products on the market. As of August 2025, nearly 70% of e-cigarettes sales were for illegal, unauthorized products.[4]
- Nicotine pouch sales are increasing more rapidly than any other tobacco or nicotine product category in the United States. Nearly all nicotine pouch products available for sale are flavored, with mint being the most commonly sold flavor.[5]
- Cigars come in hundreds of kid-friendly flavors like "Berry Fusion," "Iced Donut," and "Cherry Dynamite," and can be as cheap as 3 for 99 cents.[6] Over half of cigars sold in convenience stores are flavored products.[7]
- While overall cigarette sales have been declining, the market share of menthol cigarettes has been increasing. Menthol cigarettes comprised 36% of the market share in 2022.[8]
- There are over 1,800 unique hookah flavors, including bubble gum, cola, blueberry, strawberry cream and watermelon.[9]

Flavors Increase Youth Initiation and Use of Tobacco Products

- Flavors improve the taste and reduce the harshness of tobacco products, making them more appealing and easier for beginners—especially youth—to initiate tobacco use and ultimately become addicted.[10]
- Eight out of ten youth who have ever used tobacco initiated with a flavored product.[11]
- Flavors drove the popularity of e-cigarettes, which have been the most commonly used tobacco product among youth since 2014. 1.6 million middle and high school students reported current e-cigarette use in 2024, with nearly 90% reporting use of flavored products.[12] Nearly all (92.5%) youth and young adults who have ever used e-cigarettes started with a flavored product.[13]

- Menthol cools and numbs the throat, masking the harshness of cigarette smoke and making menthol cigarettes more appealing to youth who are initiating tobacco use.[14] Menthol cigarettes increase the number of kids who experiment with cigarettes and who become regular smokers.[15]
- Half of youth who have ever smoked initiated with menthol cigarettes.[16]
- Over 85% of youth nicotine pouch users use flavored nicotine pouches.[17]
- Seven out of ten high school cigar smokers use flavored cigars. [18]

Flavored Tobacco Products Fuel Health Disparities

- For more than 60 years, tobacco companies have targeted Black communities with menthol cigarette marketing, including community and music event sponsorship, free samples, magazine advertising, and retail promotions.[19] This decades-long marketing campaign is why use of menthol cigarettes is highest among Black Americans: 88% of Black smokers use menthol cigarettes, compared to 31% of White smokers.[20]
- Menthol cigarettes are more addictive and harder to quit.[21] As a result, menthol cigarettes have had a devastating health impact on the Black community. Each year, over 50,000 Black Americans die from a smoking-caused illness.[22]
- Menthol cigarettes also disproportionately harm other communities. Half of Hispanic smokers, 45% of Asian American smokers, and over half of lesbian, gay or bisexual smokers use menthol cigarettes. Menthol use is also higher among those with serious mental health conditions and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.[23]

Restricting the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products Will Protect Kids, Save Lives and Advance Health Equity

- States and localities should restrict the sale of flavored tobacco products, which will protect kids, save lives and advance health equity. To have the greatest impact, flavor restrictions should apply to all flavors, products and retailers and laws should be paired with robust retailer education and enforcement measures. California, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Utah, along with over 420 localities, restrict the sale of flavored e-cigarettes (some laws have exemptions for certain flavors or retailers).
- A 2020 Surgeon General report concluded that, "Prohibiting flavors, including menthol, in tobacco products can benefit public health by reducing initiation among young people and promoting cessation among adults."[24]
- Researchers estimate that prohibiting menthol cigarettes nationwide would prevent over 650,000 deaths by 2060,[25] including over 255,000 deaths in the Black community.[26]

[1] See e.g., Marketing Innovations, "Youth Cigarette - New Concepts," Memo to Brown & Williamson, September 1972, Bates No. 170042014; R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, "Conference report #23," June 5, 1974, Bates No. 500254578-4580; R.J. Reynolds Inter-office Memorandum, May 9, 1974, Bates No. 511244297-4298.
[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General (p.9). Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2024.
[3] CDC Foundation, "Monitoring U.S. E-Cigarette Sales: National Trends," https://tobaccomonitoring.org/. Data from Circana, which includes e-cigarette sales data from convenience stores, gas stations and other retail store chains. Sales from the internet and tobacco-specialty stores, including vape shops, are not included.
[4] Schoute, V. et al., "Sales Estimation and Challenges in Monitoring of E-Cigarettes with Marketing Granted Orders," Poster presented at the 2026 Annual Meeting of the Society for Research on Nicotine & Tobacco. https://tobaccomonitoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Schoute_MGO_Poster.pdf.
[5] CDC Foundation, "Monitoring Sales: Nicotine Pouch Trends," https://tobaccomonitoring.org/.
[6] Delnevo, CD, et al., "Changes in the mass-merchandise cigar market since the Tobacco Control Act," *Tobacco Regulatory Science,* 3(2 Suppl 1): S8-S16, 2017
[7] Delnevo, CD, et al. "Cigar Sales in Convenience Stores in the US, 2009-2020," *JAMA* 326(23):2429-2432.
[8] U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), *Cigarette Report for 2022*, 2023, https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/ftc_gov/pdf/2022-Cigarette-Report.pdf [data for top 4 manufacturers only].
[9] Sutfin, EL, et al., "Waterpipe Tobacco Brands and Flavors Sold Online in the USA," *Substance Use & Misuse*, published online June 30, 2024.
[10] HHS, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults, A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2012.
[11] Ambrose, BK, et al., "Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, published online October 26, 2015.
[12] Park-Lee, E., et al., "E-Cigarette and Nicotine Pouch Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2024," MMWR 73(35):774-778, September 5, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/pdfs/mm7335a3-H.pdf.
[13] CDC Foundation. (2026). Monitoring Tobacco Product Use Among Youth and Young Adults in the U.S. TEEN+ Data Snapshot, Issue 3. https://tobaccomonitoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/DataSnapshot_Issue03_ECigFlavors_v2.pdf.
[14] FDA, *Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes,* 2013.
[15] TPSAC, Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, July 21, 2011.
[16] Ambrose, BK, et al., "Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12-17 Years, 2013-2014," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, published online October 26, 2015.
[17] Park-Lee, E., et al., "E-Cigarette and Nicotine Pouch Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2024," MMWR 73(35):774-778, September 5, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/pdfs/mm7335a3-H.pdf.
[18] Birdsey, J, et al., "Tobacco Product Use Among U.S. Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2023," *MMWR* 72(44):1173-1182, November 3, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7244a1.htm.
[19] TPSAC, Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, July 21, 2011; Hafez, N. & Ling, P.M. "Finding the Kool Mixx: how Brown & Williamson used music marketing to sell cigarettes," *Tobacco Control 15:* 359-366, 2006. See also Yerger, VB, et al., "Racialized geography, corporate activity, and health disparities: Tobacco industry targeting of inner cities," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 18: 10-38, 2007. RJ Reynolds. Black Street Scenes: review and recommendations. Winston-Salem, NC: R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, 1983. Available at http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/onb19d00; Landrine, H, et al., "Cigarette advertising in Black, Latino and White magazines, 1998-2002: An exploratory investigation," *Ethnic Disparities* 15(1):63-7, 2005. Gardiner, PS, "The African Americanization of menthol cigarette use in the United States," *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 6(S1): S55-S65, 2004.
[20] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General (p.74). Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2024.
[21] Alsharari, S.D., J.R. King, J.C. Nordman, et al. "Effects of Menthol on Nicotine Pharmacokinetic, Pharmacology and Dependence in Mice." PLoS ONE, 10(9):e0137070, 2015. Available at https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0137070. Henderson, B.J., T.R. Wall, B.M. Henley, et al. "Menthol Alone Upregulates Midbrain Nachrs, Alters Nachr Subtype Stoichiometry, Alters Dopamine Neuron Firing Frequency, and Prevents Nicotine Reward." The Journal of Neuroscience, 36(10):2957-2974, 2016. Available at https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.4194-15.2016. Henderson, B.J., T.R. Wall, B.M. Henley, et al. "Menthol Enhances Nicotine Reward-Related Behavior by Potentiating Nicotine-Induced Changes in Nachr Function, Nachr Upregulation, and Da Neuron Excitability." Neuropsychopharmacology, 42:2285-2291, 2017. Available at https://doi.org/10.1038/npp.2017.72. . Zhang, M., E. Harrison, L. Biswas, et al. "Menthol Facilitates Dopamine-Releasing Effect of Nicotine in Rat Nucleus Accumbens." Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Behavior, 175:47-52, 2018. Available at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbb.2018.09.004. TPSAC, Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations, July 21, 2011 http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AdvisoryCommittees/CommitteesMeetingMaterials/TobaccoProductsScientificAdvisoryCommittee/UCM269697.pdf
[22] HHS, *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities—A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2024, at 496.
[23] Park-Lee, E., et al., "E-Cigarette and Nicotine Pouch Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2024," *MMWR* 73(35):774-778, September 5, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/pdfs/mm7335a3-H.pdf.
[24] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Smoking Cessation. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2020.
[25] Levy, DT, et al., "Public health impact of a US ban on menthol in cigarettes and cigars: a simulation study," *Tobacco Control*, published online September 2, 2021.
[26] Issabakhsh, M, et al., "Public health impact of a US menthol cigarette ban on the non-Hispanic black population: a simulation study," *Tobacco Control*, published online June 14, 2022.