
Biden Administration’s Historic Action on Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars Marks Tremendous Win for Public Health

Statement of Robin Koval, CEO and President, Truth Initiative

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 29, 2021) – We applaud the Biden Administration and FDA for choosing to be on the right side of science and history by announcing it will begin the process within the year for rulemaking to prohibit the sale of menthol cigarettes and all flavored cigars. This decision has the potential to protect millions of young people, advance health equity and saves lives. Time is of the essence in advancing this proposed ban and all efforts must be made to stop the tobacco industry from obstructing this life-saving policy from moving forward quickly. There is overwhelming evidence that menthol has perpetuated the tobacco epidemic – encouraged initiation, addiction, and disproportionate use by minority and vulnerable population groups, especially Black Americans and youth. Menthol makes it more difficult to quit smoking and is also one of the only sub-sectors of the cigarette market that is still thriving.

Menthol tobacco products are a sorry symbol of Big Tobacco’s decades long campaign targeting Black communities and communities of color through cultural appropriation and predatory tactics. As a result, nearly 90% of all Black smokers use menthol cigarettes, and more than 39,000 Black Americans die from tobacco-related cancers each year. Today’s decision is a long-overdue step to address the health impact and inequities of tobacco use and stop Big Tobacco’s ongoing racist marketing programs.

Young people use menthol tobacco products at [disproportionally high rates](#) with [46.1% of high school and 42% of middle school](#) current tobacco users reported using menthol cigarettes in the past 30 days. Menthol cigarettes have long been the “starter” cigarette for young people with menthol flavoring masking tobacco and nicotine harshness. Likewise, it is long past time for FDA to address the proliferation of youth appealing flavors in cigars – especially small, flavored cigars called cigarillos which often look just like cigarettes and are available in dessert, candy and alcoholic beverage flavors such as cotton candy, gummy bear and strawberry margarita.

We are hopeful that today’s announcement is the first of many by the Biden Administration and FDA to finish the job and eliminate **all** flavored tobacco products from the market, specifically flavored e-cigarettes which are still widely available and are a key driver of the persistent national youth e-cigarette epidemic. **Nearly all young users** (82.9%) use flavored products and a majority of young e-cigarette users surveyed cite flavors as a key reason for vaping.



This FDA action has the potential to help millions of smokers make the decision to quit. In fact, our [research](#) has shown that the majority of adult respondents support banning menthol and 44.5% of Black American menthol smokers surveyed reported that they would try to quit if there was a ban.

The FDA must use its full authority to issue a proposed product standard as soon as possible. Despite their rhetoric to be part of the public health solution to end smoking, the tobacco industry historically obstructs and delays public health policies to reduce tobacco use. They have, not surprisingly, already registered their opposition to today's much needed and long-awaited announcement and it is highly likely they will attempt to delay this move. We suggest they re-think such an action if they really believe they can be part of the solution to our nation's ongoing tobacco epidemic. Without such industry interference, a smoke free world is truly within our reach.

About Truth Initiative®

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization that is inspiring lives free from smoking, vaping and nicotine and building a culture where all young people reject tobacco. In 2020, we celebrated 20 years of saving lives and preventing millions of youth from smoking. Our impact has helped drive the teen smoking rate down from 23% in 2000 to 4.2% in 2020. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign. **truth** has also recently taken on the youth epidemics of vaping and opioids. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment, are also helping to end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization, formerly known as the American Legacy Foundation, was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit truthinitiative.org.

###