



Eliminating Tobacco Flavors

The American Heart Association's Position

The removal of all characterizing flavors other than tobacco from all tobacco products is essential for reducing their appeal to youth. Controversy arises because, while there is no experimental evidence to support that flavors help adults switch from combustible to non-combustible tobacco products or to quit tobacco altogether, there are individual reports suggesting that for some adults, flavors are appealing. However, maintaining flavors to attract adult smokers increases the risk of these products being available for youth and young adults. Additional research is needed to determine how best to balance the need to reduce flavorings' appeal to kids and young adults with the potential that flavorings may facilitate switching or smoking cessation among adult smokers.

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009 banned characterizing flavors in cigarettes, except for menthol, but did not address flavors in other tobacco products. In January 2020, the FDA issued guidance that removed some flavored cartridge-based electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) from the market. However, the policy failed to include menthol- or tobacco-flavored cartridge-based e-cigarettes, and any flavored disposable e-cigarettes, and e-liquids used in refillable, open tank systems. Based upon our assessment of the evidence available today, the American Heart Association advocates for the FDA and state and local governments to restrict the sale of all characterizing flavors, including menthol, in all tobacco products. At the federal level, the Association also recognizes and promotes FDA's authority to restrict and regulate these flavors.

Fast Facts:

1. There is overwhelming evidence that flavors attract youth. One study showed that the first tobacco product used by 81% of youth is a flavored tobacco product.¹
2. The number of flavors in newer tobacco products has increased substantially in recent years with industry marketing thousands of youth-enticing flavors such as fruit, candy, vanilla, unicorn, and mint-flavored products.² Menthol and other flavors reduce the harsh sensation of tobacco in the mouth and throat, increasing appeal, nicotine exposure and dependence.^{2,3}
3. A 2020 systematic review exploring the impact of a potential U.S menthol cigarette ban found it could potentially result in the reduction sales of cigarettes, increases in smoking cessation, and reductions in smoking initiation.⁴
4. More than 80% of African-American smokers use menthol cigarettes compared to less than 30% of Caucasian smokers.⁵

Impact: In 2017, San Francisco passed one of the first stringent flavored tobacco product restrictions in the US, eliminating all flavored e-cigarette liquids, cigars, and hookah. The American Heart Association and our partners fought hard to pass the ordinance through the city council, then defend it when the tobacco industry funded an effort to put it on the ballot. Voters were heard loud and clear when they overwhelmingly voted to keep the ban. Since then, over 100 cities across California, Minnesota, Colorado, Massachusetts, Illinois, and New York have restricted the sale of menthol cigarettes, and other flavored products.⁶

For more information and resources from the American Heart Association's policy research department on tobacco please visit: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/policy-research>.

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2. Morean ME, Butler ER, Bold KW, Kong G, Camenga DR, Cavallo DA, Simon P, O'Malley SS and Krishnan-Sarin S. Preferring more e-cigarette flavors is associated with e-cigarette use frequency among adolescents but not adults. *PLoS One.* 2018;13:e0189015.
3. Dai H and Hao J. Flavored Electronic Cigarette Use and Smoking Among Youth. *Pediatrics.* 2016;138
4. Cadham, C.J., Sanchez-Romero, L.M., Fleischer, N.L. et al. The actual and anticipated effects of a menthol cigarette ban: a scoping review. *BMC Public Health* 20, 1055 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09055-z>
5. Kozlitina, J. Risso, D., et al., An African-specific haplotype in *MRGPRX4* is associated with menthol cigarette smoking. *PLOS Genetics.* February 15, 2019.
6. States & Localities that have restricted the sale of flavored tobacco products. October 23, 2020. <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0398.pdf> Accessed November 9, 2020.