

Study: No surge in illicit cigarettes after menthol ban

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Contrary to the tobacco industry's assertions, there was no surge in illicit cigarettes after a 2015 ban on menthol cigarette sales in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. The finding is included in a brief report

appearing in *Tobacco Control*.

In May 2015, the Canadian province of Nova Scotia became the first jurisdiction in the world to ban menthol cigarettes. At the time, the [tobacco industry](#) claimed that "the primary effect of this law will be to increase the illegal [tobacco](#) market in Nova Scotia." To find out if that warning came to be true, Michal Stoklosa, MA, an economic and health policy research scientist at the American Cancer Society, undertook the first attempt to examine the impact of the menthol ban on trends in illicit cigarettes.

To investigate the ban's effect, data on the number of illicit cigarettes seized in Nova Scotia covering the period from 2007/08 to 2017/18 were obtained from the Provincial Tax Commission in Nova Scotia to compare seizures before and after the ban was implemented.

While enforcement efforts in Nova Scotia have not declined in the recent years, the number of seized illicit cigarettes of any kind declined significantly, from more than 60,000 cartons in 2007/08 to just under 10,000 cartons in 2017/18. The bulk of this decline occurred in the late 2000's, suggesting that seizures were unrelated to the menthol ban.

In the years after the 2015 menthol ban, [seizure](#) volume remained stable, with no statistically significant difference in the number of cigarettes seized before and after. "This indicates that illicit cigarette sales in the province are similarly unlikely to be increasing," said Mr. Stoklosa. "Indeed, Nova Scotia tax authorities estimate that the prevalence of illegal tobacco in the province has actually decreased, from 30 per cent of all tobacco consumed in 2006/07 to less than 10 per cent in 2016/17. There were only a few small seizures of [menthol](#) cigarettes in the year following the ban, after which there have been no further seizures of [menthol cigarettes](#)."

The author concludes that credible evidence on illicit cigarette trade, independent of tobacco industry influence, is desperately needed to support implementation of tobacco control policies.

More information: Jesse Elias et al, Revolution or redux? Assessing IQOS through a precursor product, *Tobacco Control* (2018). [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054327](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054327)

Provided by American Cancer Society

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