

Menthols lured 10 million Americans to smoking since 1980, study shows

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Menthol cigarettes helped lure about 10 million extra Americans into

smoking over 38 years, with often deadly results, according to a new study.

Researchers also concluded that menthol cigarettes were responsible for 378,000 [premature deaths](#) in the United States during the study period —1980 to 2018. Their report appears in the journal *Tobacco Control*.

The findings suggest that menthol cigarettes "have had a significant detrimental impact on the public's health and could continue to pose a substantial health risk" to all age groups, the authors said in a journal news release. They were led by Thuy Le, from the University of Michigan School of Public Health.

Menthols, such as Newports and Kools, started to become widely used in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By creating a cooling sensation in the throat and airways, menthol reduces the irritation and harshness of cigarette smoke.

Because of this, it's believed that menthol cigarettes encourage [young people](#) to start smoking and make it harder for smokers to quit, the researchers said.

In order to assess the threat menthol cigarettes pose to Americans' health, Le and colleagues used a [simulation model](#) to determine how U.S. smoking would have been affected if menthols weren't available between 1980 and 2018.

They determined that the availability of menthol cigarettes slowed the fall in U.S. smoking rates by 2.6 percentage points. Without menthol cigarettes, the U.S. smoking rate would have fallen from just over 33% in 1980 to just over 11% in 2018. The actual rate in 2018 was nearly 14%.

The researchers also determined that [menthol cigarettes](#) were responsible for 10.1 million extra smokers (266,000 every year), 3 million cumulative years of life lost, and 378,000 premature deaths (9,900 every year) between 1980 and 2018.

In 2009, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration was given the power to ban menthol in cigarettes, but hasn't done it. This study may help the FDA create regulations for menthol tobacco products, the researchers suggested.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers a [guide for quitting smoking](#).

SOURCE: *Tobacco Control*, news release, Feb. 25, 2021

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