

More than a million smokers likely to quit after US bans menthol cigarettes

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A new study projects that a U.S. ban on menthol cigarettes, proposed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, will lead more than 1.3 million smokers to quit. Among them, Black smokers will see the greatest

impact.

Researchers from the University of Waterloo led the study, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Toronto and seven U.S. universities. To make the projection, the team evaluated the impact of Canada's ban on [menthol](#) cigarettes, which came into force nationally in 2017. They combined data from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project) and the Ontario Menthol Ban Study, which surveyed people before and after the ban. Smokers of menthol cigarettes in Canada quit smoking at a rate of 22.3%, compared to 15.0% of non-menthol smokers. The difference of 7.3% is highly statistically significant.

"Our study confirms that Canada's menthol cigarette ban led to substantial public health benefits," said Geoffrey T. Fong, professor of psychology and public health sciences at the University of Waterloo and lead author of the study. "Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death and disease in Canada, the United States, and globally." Fong is also senior investigator at the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research and principal investigator of the ITC Project.

To estimate the impact of a U.S. ban on menthol cigarettes, the study applied the effect the Canadian ban had on quitting to U.S. statistics on menthol smokers. The study projected that a U.S. ban on menthol cigarettes would lead to an increase in quitting of 1,337,988 U.S. smokers. Because 80% of Black smokers smoke menthols—compared to about 35% of U.S. smokers overall—the impact of a menthol cigarette ban in the U.S. would be proportionately greater for them. The projections are that 381,272 Black smokers would quit after a U.S. ban on menthols.

"These findings provide the foundation for the U.S. and other countries considering menthol cigarette bans to estimate the possible impact of

such bans on reducing smoking," said Michael O. Chaiton, scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, director of research at the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, and principal investigator of the Ontario Menthol Ban Study.

For more than a decade, public health experts, scientists, civil rights groups, and anti-tobacco organizations—including the World Health Organization—have called upon governments to ban menthol cigarettes. In addition to Canada, more than 30 other countries have banned [menthol cigarettes](#), including all member states of the European Union.

Menthol is added to cigarettes because it creates a cooling sensation that takes the edge off the harshness of cigarette smoke, making it easier to start smoking and facilitating addiction, all reasons why [public health experts](#) have called for a menthol ban.

The study appears in the journal *Tobacco Control*.

More information: Geoffrey T Fong et al, Impact of Canada's menthol cigarette ban on quitting among menthol smokers: pooled analysis of pre–post evaluation from the ITC Project and the Ontario Menthol Ban Study and projections of impact in the USA, *Tobacco Control* (2022). [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-057227](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-057227)

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