

Biden administration delays decision on menthol cigarette ban amid pushback

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The Biden administration has again delayed enacting a ban on menthol cigarettes following intense lobbying from the tobacco industry.

Along with that pressure, other critics of the ban have warned that it might anger Black smokers, who use menthol cigarettes at far higher rates than whites—just as President Biden gears up to run for re-election, [administration officials](#) told the Washington Post.

The [delay](#), which was posted Wednesday, now says officials plan to finalize rules to put the ban in place in March.

Officials had originally planned to finalize the rules last August and later signaled to [public health groups](#) that they hoped to finish them by January, the Post reported. Still, the ban would not likely go into effect for several years because of the legal challenges that many expect will come.

But anti-smoking advocates aren't waiting to push passage of the ban.

Karen Knudsen, chief executive of the American Cancer Society, said her organization is among a coalition of public health associations that this month will take out ads in national newspapers, send letters to lawmakers and use other measures to push the Biden administration to finalize the rule sooner rather than later.

"The cost of inaction is high," Knudsen told the Post, citing projections that a ban on menthol cigarettes would save up to 650,000 lives over the next four decades.

Many of the lives saved would be Black lives, federal data shows.

More than 18.5 million people in the United States smoked [menthol cigarettes](#) in 2019. Among smokers who are Black, 81 percent choose

menthols, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is also pursuing a ban on flavored cigars and new limits on nicotine in cigarettes, although the process of finalizing those rules is to be delayed until at least March as well, the *Post* reported.

The White House said Tuesday it could not comment on pending ban, the *Post* reported.

Anti-smoking advocates decried the delay.

"There is absolutely no reason for delay on a policy that has been studied for more than 12 years and is essential to the President's health equity and Cancer Moonshot agenda," Yolonda Richardson, chief executive of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said in a [statement](#). "If the White House gives in to the [tobacco industry](#)'s fear-mongering now, it will further undermine [public trust](#) in government and make it even harder to move forward in an election year."

Meanwhile, R.J. Reynolds, which makes the nation's top-selling menthol brand, said in a statement that a ban would harm [small businesses](#), cut tax revenue and create a dangerous black market, the *Post* reported.

"A ban on menthol flies in the face of proven science and is contrary to the FDA's stated goal of reducing the health effects of tobacco use," the statement said.

But Delmonte Jefferson, executive director of the Center for Black Health & Equity, said he doesn't believe a ban will cost Black votes.

"When you ban menthol, you're going to save Black lives," Jefferson told

the Post. "You mess with the Black vote when you say, 'I don't value your life, I don't value your health.'"

More information: Visit the FDA for more on the [menthol ban](#).

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