

African Americans and the general public support banning menthol in cigarettes

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According to a new study released online today, a majority of Americans, including most African Americans, stand together in support of banning menthol in cigarettes just as other cigarette flavorings have now been banned by the FDA. According to established reports, 83 percent of African American smokers and 24 percent of white smokers smoke menthol cigarettes.

This new study was done by the Center for Child and Adolescent [Health Policy](#) at MassGeneral Hospital for Children (MGHfC), the American Academy of Pediatrics' Julius B. Richmond Center of Excellence, and the American Legacy Foundation. It will appear in print in the May 12 issue of the [American Journal of Public Health](#).

"For decades, the [tobacco industry](#) has heavily marketed [menthol cigarettes](#) to minority communities and as a result, the menthol smoking rates in those communities are disproportionately high. Our research shows that African Americans and the general public want the simple justice of removing menthol from cigarettes," said Jonathan Winickoff, MD, MPH, of MGHfC and the lead author of the study. "The cigarette is one of the most highly engineered products ever created and each additive has a specific purpose. Menthol cigarette flavoring plays a key role in promoting smoking by numbing the throat, promoting early smoking, and allowing the smoke to go in deeper at an earlier stage of smoking."

In this study, investigators conducted a nationally representative telephone survey conducted in November 2009. Out of 2,560 eligible respondents contacted, 1514 (59 percent) completed surveys. Due to the large percentage of African American smokers using menthol, an additional 427 African American individuals were contacted, following the same protocol, to obtain more precise estimates of attitudes in this group. Within that group, 303 (75.7 percent) completed the survey. The two samples were analyzed separately.

Results showed that overall support among adults for banning menthol in cigarettes was 56.1 percent. The number of African Americans in the original sample who also supported prohibiting menthol was 68.0 percent along with 53.4 percent whites. Among respondents aged 18 to 24 years, 50.3 percent supported a ban on menthol; among respondents with less than a high school diploma, 71.2 percent supported a ban. Among women, 64.7 percent supported a ban on menthols.

"Menthol should be removed from cigarettes period. The tobacco industry has profited enough off the African American community," said Winickoff who is also an associate professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and affiliated with the Richmond Center of Excellence.

Provided by Massachusetts General Hospital

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