



Eliminating Tobacco Flavors

The American Heart Association's Position

The American Heart Association advocates for the elimination of all characterizing flavors other than tobacco from all tobacco products. The removal of all flavorings from tobacco products is necessary to reduce appeal to youth and adults. AHA is committed to ending tobacco and nicotine addiction in the U.S. Restricting flavors in all tobacco products should be a priority in achieving the tobacco endgame.

While there is no experimental evidence to support that flavors help adults switch from combustible to non-combustible tobacco products or to quit tobacco altogether, there are individual reports suggesting that for some adults, flavors are appealing. Menthol and other flavors reduce the harsh sensation of tobacco in the mouth and throat, increasing appeal, nicotine exposure and dependence.^{1,2} However, maintaining flavors to attract adult smokers increases the risk of these products being available for youth and young adults. Additional research is needed to determine how best to balance the need to reduce flavorings' appeal to kids and young adults with the potential that flavorings may facilitate switching or smoking cessation among adult smokers.

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009 banned characterizing flavors in cigarettes, except for menthol, but did not address flavors in other tobacco products. In January 2020, the FDA issued guidance that removed some flavored cartridge-based electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) from the market. However, the policy failed to include menthol- or tobacco-flavored cartridge-based e-cigarettes, and any flavored disposable e-cigarettes, and e-liquids used in refillable, open tank systems. So, despite this ban, between February 2020 and April 2022, total e-cigarette sales increase 59%. Likewise, sales of non-tobacco flavored e-cigarettes increased by 59%, and sales of disposable devices increased over 133%.⁷ In April 2022, the FDA placed synthetic nicotine under its authority, which resulted in a 13% drop in e-cigarette sales between April and October 2022 and only a 2% drop in non-tobacco flavored e-cigarettes.⁷ Based upon our

assessment of the evidence available today, the American Heart Association advocates for the FDA and state and local governments to restrict the sale of all characterizing flavors, including menthol, in all tobacco products. At the federal level, the Association also recognizes and promotes FDA's authority to restrict and regulate these flavors. In April 2022, the FDA released proposed product standards to prohibit menthol cigarettes and all characterizing flavors in cigars. The proposed rule advanced to final rule status in January 2023 and is expected to have a final decision by August 2023.

Fast Facts:

1. There is overwhelming evidence that flavors attract youth. The PATH Study found between 81% and 86% of youth and young adults who ever used tobacco reported a flavored product as their first tobacco product.³
2. The number of flavors in newer tobacco products has increased substantially in recent years with industry marketing thousands of youth-enticing flavors such as fruit, candy, vanilla, unicorn, and mint-flavored products.¹
3. A 2020 systematic review exploring the impact of a potential U.S menthol cigarette ban found it could potentially result in the reduction sales of cigarettes, increases in smoking cessation, and reductions in smoking initiation.⁴
4. An estimated 86% of African American smokers and 46% Hispanic smokers smoke menthol cigarettes in comparison to about 29% of White smokers.⁵
5. A new analysis from the PATH study found that adults who smoked menthol cigarettes had lower odds of smoking cessation (non-Hispanic Black menthol smokers had a much lower odds of quitting than non-Hispanic White or Hispanic menthol users).⁶

Policy At A Glance: Tobacco Flavorings

Impact: In 2017, San Francisco passed one of the first stringent flavored tobacco product restrictions in the US, eliminating all flavored e-cigarette liquids, cigars, and hookah. The American Heart Association and our partners fought hard to pass the ordinance through the city council, then defended it when the tobacco industry funded an effort to put it on the ballot. Voters were heard loud and clear when they overwhelmingly voted to keep the ban. In 2019, Massachusetts was the first state to restrict sales on all flavored tobacco products. Since then, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and California have passed state-wide bans, and over 300 localities have passed restrictions.⁸

References

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