

Menthol Cigarette Use



November 2024

Menthol is a flavor additive created from mint plants, such as peppermint and when added to cigarettes, produces a cooling sensation and reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), menthol in cigarettes makes it easier to start smoking and harder to quit. The tobacco industry has relied on these effects along with targeted advertising to contribute to health disparities among African Americans, women, the LGBTQ community and youth.^{1,2,3}

While other flavors like candy, fruit, and spices have been banned in cigarettes due to the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, menthol was notably excluded and remains the only flavor allowed for cigarettes.⁴

Tobacco Industry Relies on Advertising to Promote Menthol Products

Although menthol cigarettes can mask the harshness of smoking by reducing pain or coughing, they are not less harmful compared to non-menthol cigarettes. In fact, a growing number of studies suggest that menthol cigarettes are harder to quit.⁵ While it is illegal to directly claim health benefits today, companies still use words such as "fresh," "organic," and "light" in their advertisements and packaging to give a false impression about menthol products.²

Studies Show Menthol Cigarettes Contribute to Health Disparities

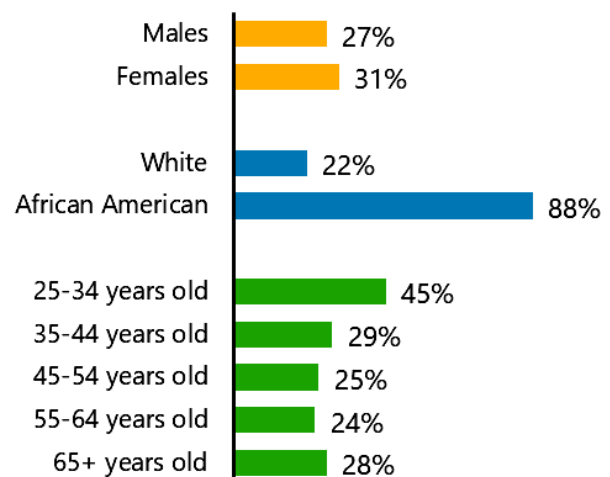
Stanford University and the American Heart Association recently published findings on the history of tobacco marketing and highlighted that beginning in the 1930s, the tobacco industry promoted menthol cigarettes as a healthier alternative to non-menthol cigarettes. Later in the 1960's the tobacco industry began targeting certain groups with menthol cigarettes including marginalized groups, such as African Americans, women, and young adults (ages 18-34).

The tobacco industry has used menthol advertisements to commemorate Black History Month and has featured famous women's fashion designers. Today there are increased rates of menthol cigarette use among those same groups, both across the U.S. and in Indiana. In Indiana, 88% of African American adults that smoke cigarettes report usually smoking menthol cigarettes compared to white adults who smoke.^{6,7,8,9}

Fast Facts

- Menthol cigarettes are **NOT** less harmful than non-menthol cigarettes.^{2,3}
- The tobacco industry aggressively markets menthol cigarettes to certain groups, including African Americans, women, and youth.^{6,7,8,9}
- **4 in 5** African American Indiana adults who smoked reported smoking menthol cigarettes.⁹
- Menthol makes quitting smoking more difficult.^{12,13}

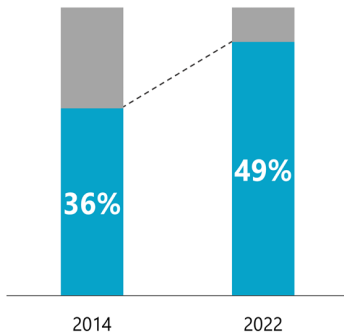
Percentage of Indiana Adults Who Reported Usually Smoking Menthol Cigarettes among those Currently Smoking Cigarettes, BRFSS, 2023



*Due to low response rates, estimates for those 18-24 years old and Hispanic adults are unavailable.

Although cigarette use among Indiana youth has decreased in recent years, the percentage of menthol cigarette use among high school students that smoke, has increased from 36% in 2014 to 46% in 2022.¹⁰

Menthol Cigarette Use Among Indiana High School Students Who Smoke Cigarettes, IYTS 2014-2022



This is a concerning trend due to the increasing amount of evidence showing that menthol can make it harder to quit smoking.

Data from the National Youth Tobacco Survey noted when compared to youth smoking non-menthol cigarettes, those smoking menthol cigarettes were more likely to:

- Smoke more than 2 cigarettes per day.
- Smoke at least 20 of the past 30 days.
- Want tobacco within 30 minutes of waking.



Menthol is also a common flavor advertised for e-cigarettes/vapes, and is known to attract youth to try these products.¹¹

Menthol Cigarette Cessation

Numerous studies have shown a lower quit rate for those smoking menthol cigarettes compared to those smoking non-menthol cigarettes, especially in non-white populations. Additionally, the flavor has also been linked to higher relapse rates and overall making it harder to successfully quit.^{12,13}

Given these reports, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed to prohibit the sale of menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes. If approved, this would reduce the appeal of cigarettes, particularly to youth and those not yet smoking.^{14,15}

The CDC estimates that a ban on menthol cigarettes in the US could lead to 15,400 adults quitting smoking in Indiana.

Conclusion

- Menthol is also a common flavor advertised for e-cigarettes/vapes, and is known to attract youth to try these products.¹¹
- Menthol cigarettes make it easier to start smoking and harder to quit.
- The percentage of menthol cigarette use among high school students who smoke, has increased.

What Can You Do?

- If you or someone you know needs to quit tobacco, call **1-800-Quit-Now** or visit **QuitNowIndiana.com** for free support.
- **Quit Now Indiana** offers no-cost tobacco treatment services with a Menthol Enhancement which provides **tailored coaching support, menthol education content,** and **free nicotine replacement medications.**
- Join a **local tobacco control coalition** in your community.
- Encourage leaders to support efforts to reform how menthol flavored tobacco products are marketed and sold.

For additional information on Indiana tobacco prevention and cessation: [in.gov/health/tpc](https://www.in.gov/health/tpc)



Tobacco Prevention and Cessation

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Tobacco Prevention and Cessation