



# Menthol Cigarettes

## What schools should know

As the trusted champion for lung health, the American Lung Association is committed to creating a tobacco-free future and saving lives. We advocate for smokefree public spaces, work to achieve tobacco regulation to protect public health and have helped a million people quit smoking.

While the number of people smoking continues to decrease, the presence of menthol on the market continues to be an issue. As of 2022, about 36% of all cigarette sales were menthol cigarettes. Now, new legislation could limit the future sale of these products, potentially saving hundreds of thousands of lives each year—and we need your help to make it happen.

**BECAUSE, WHEN YOU CAN'T BREATHE,  
NOTHING ELSE MATTERS®.**

### What is menthol?

- Menthol is a chemical that makes cigarettes easier to smoke and harder to quit.<sup>1</sup>
- Found naturally in mint plants, menthol creates a cooling effect that reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke and suppresses coughing.<sup>1</sup>
- This makes menthol cigarettes more appealing to young or inexperienced smokers, and research shows that they are more likely to addict youth.<sup>1</sup>

### Menthol: A starter product for youth

- Data from nationally representative samples show that the youngest age groups use menthol cigarettes at the highest rates.<sup>2,3</sup>
- From 2019 to 2021, 60.0% of teenagers who smoked menthol cigarettes, compared to 51.5% of 18–25-year-old smokers and 52.2% of 26–34-year-old smokers, and 36.9% of 35 and over year-old smokers.<sup>2</sup>
- Data from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that 78.5% of current smokers ages 12–17 reported smoking menthol cigarettes.
- Evidence from tobacco industry documents shows that the industry studied smokers' menthol preferences and manipulated menthol levels to appeal to a variety of smokers, including adolescents and young adults.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>
- Youth who smoke menthol cigarettes are significantly more likely to show signs of nicotine addiction than their peers who smoke non-menthol brands.<sup>8–12</sup>
- Longitudinal studies show that initiation with menthol cigarettes leads to established cigarette use in young smokers.<sup>9,13</sup>
- The proportion of smokers using menthol cigarettes is increasing among youth. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, while use of non-menthol cigarettes has decreased, the percentage of teens who use menthol cigarettes has increased.<sup>2,14</sup>

## Aren't flavored cigarettes illegal?

- The 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act ended the sale of flavors in cigarettes – except menthol. Shortly thereafter, the Food and Drug Administration's Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee recommended that FDA act to end the sale of these products through its regulatory powers.
- There are currently no federal restrictions on flavors in other tobacco products, including little cigars, cigarillos, and smokeless tobacco.
- On May 4, 2022, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) formally issued two proposed rules—one to remove menthol cigarettes from the market, and the other to remove flavored cigars.

## What should schools do to protect students from these products?

- Institute and enforce comprehensive tobacco-free campus policies that include all mentholated tobacco products.
- Offer quit programs on site, as many students are already nicotine-dependent.
- Provide education rather than punishment around the harms of tobacco products.
- Ensure all staff know the different kinds of tobacco products on the market and the dangers they pose to students.

## American Lung Association Resources

- N-O-T® (Not On Tobacco) is a teen vaping and smoking cessation program and provides the tools, information, and support to quit for good. [Lung.org/NOT](https://Lung.org/NOT)
- INDEPTH® is an alternative-to-suspension program for students who violate school tobacco use policy. [Lung.org/INDEPTH](https://Lung.org/INDEPTH)
- Our Vape-Free Schools Initiative helps schools navigate the public health crisis of youth vaping and allows them to become recognized leaders by offering students education, cessation, and support. [Lung.org/vape-free-schools](https://Lung.org/vape-free-schools)



## Contact

Our Lung Helpline is a free service staffed by registered nurses, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, and certified tobacco cessation specialists.

- **1-800-LUNG-USA** (1-800-586-4872) [Lung.org/helpline](https://Lung.org/helpline)
- Learn more about these and other programs at [Lung.org](https://Lung.org).

Contact your local American Lung Association office for information on youth leadership groups and other youth tobacco initiatives. **1-800-LUNGUSA**

## References

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