

Menthol and flavored tobacco are hooking Vermont kids: Stop children from becoming addicted to tobacco -- Pass S.18



The main goal of S.18 is to take away the appeal of flavors in tobacco, so they are no longer attractive to children. This policy is primarily about (and effective in) making sure young people never starting on these highly addictive, deadly products. Why? Because already more than a quarter of Vermont high school students are hooked.

Supporting this pro-public health and anti-tobacco policy will end the tobacco industry's ability to prey on our children to become their "replacement smokers" for generations to come and keep current customers addicted and their profits rolling in.

End the Sale of Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Tobacco:

(1) Tobacco use is costly to Vermont.

The annual cost of treating tobacco-caused illnesses in Vermont has risen from \$348 million to \$404 million annually, with \$93 million in direct Medicaid expenditures. Residents' state and federal tax burden from tobacco-caused expenditures is \$1,307 per household. 1000 adults die every year in Vermont from tobacco use.

(2) Flavors have an allure that is hooking Vermont youth on tobacco products and daily use is increasing, indicating likely addiction.

More than 8 in 10 youth who have ever used tobacco products started with flavored products. Nearly all (97%) of youth e-cigarette users report using flavored products, while most report that flavored products are a key reason for their use. There are more than 15,000 flavors available.

More than a quarter of Vermont high school students now vape. Daily e-cig use increased from 9% to 31% indicating likely addiction. All tobacco products contain nicotine, which is particularly harmful to youths' developing brains (a disposable pod has as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes).

(3) Menthol tobacco makes starting easier and quitting harder.

54% of youth start by using menthol. This is because Menthol numbs the throat to hide harsh tobacco smoke. Menthol reduces irritation, thus increasing the amount of smoke that is inhaled and allowing the smoker to inhale deeper and longer. Inhaling more smoke means greater nicotine intake, making menthol more addictive and harder to quit.

Menthol was the only flavored cigarette left on the market when the federal government took action in 2009. In 2019 and in 2020, **sales of menthol-flavored cigarettes made up 37% of all cigarette sales in the U.S.**—the highest proportion since major tobacco companies were first required to report those data to the federal government in 1967. **More than a third of its profits coming from menthol is why the industry is fighting so hard to prevent policies like this.**

(4) People of color have been heavily targeted by tobacco companies pushing menthol cigarettes.

For decades, these companies have spent millions of dollars on advertisements, sponsorships, and promotions targeted towards communities predominantly composed of people of color to get them

hooked. They priced menthol cigarettes more cheaply in communities of color, gave free menthols away in iconic Black neighborhoods across the country, and appropriated Black culture, all to help hook as many generations of Black and brown Americans as possible.

As a result of these efforts, 85% of black adult smokers and 7 out of 10 black youth smokers smoke menthol. And, black people are more likely to die from smoking-related diseases (e.g. heart disease, diabetes) than all other individuals. In fact, tobacco use contributes to the three leading causes of death among Black people— heart disease, cancer, and stroke.

(5) This is working elsewhere.

Its working in Massachusetts. Massachusetts passed legislation in November 2019 eliminating the sale of flavored and menthol tobacco products. **Now, adult and youth tobacco rates are decreasing. From 2019 to 2021, youth smoking rates decreased from 4.3% to 2.9% and youth vaping rates decreased from 32% to 17.6%. Adult cigarette smoking declined from 12.1% to 10.6%.**

And evidence shows this legislation will NOT lead tobacco retailers and convenient stores to close as people will go to neighboring states for their flavored products.

In fact, data from the department of health in Massachusetts shows the number of both convenience stores and retail tobacco licenses have increased since the law took effect there. In February 2020, there were 6,258 tobacco retailers (of which 3,767 were convenience stores), and as of April 2022, there were 6,491 tobacco retailers (including 3,994 convenience stores). This is consistent with other research on the impact of tobacco control policies that shows that when tobacco users quit, the money spent on tobacco products in state retail stores does not disappear from the economy but simply shifts to consumer spending on other products or services.

(6) Vermont should act now as FDA action will likely take years.

Though the FDA announced proposed rules last spring to ban the manufacturing and sales of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, historically, it has taken over a decade for the FDA to actually implement these types of rules due to their lengthy processes, anticipated court challenges and other factors. There is no reason for Vermont to wait. States like Massachusetts and California did not wait. Vermont has always been a leader in its tobacco control policies and there is urgent need to enact these measures this year.

In addition, the FDA's action in 2020 to address e-cigarettes left gaping loopholes. It only addressed pod-based e-cigarettes, didn't include menthol, and left open-tank e-cigarettes, flavored e-liquids and disposable e-cigarettes available which kids immediately gravitated to.

(7) Addiction isn't a choice.

We aren't taking away choice with this action. Non-flavored cigarettes and e-cigarettes would still be available. More importantly, 95% of the people making this choice as adults actually got addicted to the product when they were minors.

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