Menthol makes cigarettes easier to smoke and harder to quit. Menthol provides a cooling effect in the back of the throat, reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke and suppresses coughing. Menthol was first added to cigarettes in the 1920s and 1930s and became widespread in the 1950s and 1960s.

Menthol and Youth

Nearly 50% of youth ages 12-17 who smoke traditional cigarettes use menthol.

Nearly 65% of young menthol smokers say they would quit if menthol cigarettes were banned.

Nearly 60% of high school students who use e-cigarettes use mint or menthol flavored products.

With menthol e-cigarettes remaining on the market, more kids will gravitate towards them, even as other flavored products come off.

Menthol cigarette use among current smokers in the US by age, 2012-2014:

- Ages 12-17: 53.9%
- Ages 18-25: 50%
- Ages 26-34: 43.9%
- Ages 35-49: 32.9%
- Ages 50+: 32.9%

Menthol and African Americans

African Americans suffer the greatest burden of tobacco-related death of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.

Nearly 45,000 African Americans die annually from a smoking-caused illness.

Menthol flavored tobacco products are a big driver of these disparities.
Big Tobacco’s shameful record includes targeting youth and adults in communities of color and underserved populations with menthol products resulting in the disproportionately higher use rates by minority smokers:

Cigarette companies are known to specifically target low-income neighborhoods with in-store advertising for menthol cigarettes.

Federal Action - Menthol And Flavored Tobacco Restriction Timeline

- **2009**: Congress bans the sale of flavored cigarettes, except for menthol, leaving that action up to the FDA
- **2011**: Tobacco industry, led by Lorillard (now R.J. Reynolds) filed a lawsuit trying to prohibit the FDA from using the TPSAC report, a district court judge sided with Big Tobacco, the FDA appealed this decision
- **July 2013**: FDA releases its own evaluation of menthol finding that menthol cigarettes likely pose a greater public health risk than non-menthol versions, and requested public comment
- **March 2011**: FDA’s Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee (TPSAC), created by the Tobacco Control Act, issues report concluding removal of menthol cigarettes in the marketplace would benefit public health in the US
- **April 2013**: 20 leading health organizations, including the American Heart Association, file a Citizen Petition urging the FDA to prohibit menthol as a characterizing flavoring in cigarettes
- **2016**: D.C. Circuit reversed the district court’s decision, now allowing the FDA to rely on the TPSAC menthol report to regulate menthol tobacco products
- **March 2018**: FDA requests public comment on the role of flavorings in tobacco products, including menthol
- **January 2020**: FDA issues policy to restrict sale of certain flavored e-cigarettes but allow menthol flavors and flavored liquid nicotine used in open tank systems and disposable e-cigarettes to remain on the market

If a menthol cigarette ban had been enacted in 2011, it could have saved 320,000 lives by 2050.