

Durbin Statement On Proposed FDA Ban Of Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars

April 29 2021 12:23 PM



WASHINGTON — U.S Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today released the following statement after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced it will propose a ban on the use of menthol in cigarettes, as well as a ban on the use of all flavors—including menthol—in cigars:

“Cigarettes addict, sicken, and kill. For years, Big Tobacco has added menthol flavor to mask the harshness, and targeted these addictive products to Black smokers. There is zero public health justification for allowing Big Tobacco companies to continue using menthol in their products. Today’s announcement will save lives.”

For more than 50 years, the tobacco industry has targeted Black Americans with pervasive marketing of menthol cigarettes through sponsorship of community and music events, magazine advertising, and retail promotions. Today, menthol cigarettes continue to be heavily advertised, widely available, and priced cheaper in Black communities, making them especially appealing to price-sensitive youth. In the 1950s, less than 10 percent of Black smokers used menthol cigarettes. Today, about 85 percent of Black smokers smoke menthols (three times the rate of white smokers). While Black smokers smoke less, they die of heart attacks, strokes, and other causes linked to tobacco use at higher rates than white smokers, and have lower success rates of quitting.

Tobacco products with menthol can be more addictive and harder to quit by reducing the discomfort of smoking and enhancing the effects of nicotine. One [study](#) suggests that banning menthol cigarettes in the U.S. would lead an additional 923,000 smokers to quit, including 230,000 African Americans in the first 13 to 17 months after a ban goes into effect. An earlier [study](#) projected that about 633,000 deaths would be averted, including about 237,000 deaths averted for African Americans.

Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable and premature death, annually accounting for 480,000 deaths—or one out of every five deaths—in America. Tobacco use costs more than \$300 billion a year, including \$170 billion in direct medical care for adults, 60 percent of which is paid through government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, and more than \$156 billion in lost productivity.

According to the most recent public health data from CDC, 4.5 million youth are using tobacco products. Flavors in cigars, including menthol, are responsible for driving youth use of these tobacco products. Flavored cigars represent approximately half of the overall cigar market, and contribute to the fact that more high school students smoked cigars than cigarettes. Black high school students smoke cigars at more than three times the rate of cigarettes.