



# MENTHOL CIGARETTES: A PUBLIC HEALTH HAZARD

**Public Health Solutions (PHS)** is the largest public health nonprofit serving New York City. With two million New Yorkers living at or below the poverty line, PHS is at the forefront of tackling crucial public health issues, including food and nutrition, health insurance access, maternal and child health, reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS prevention.

For decades, the tobacco industry has used menthol cigarettes to target vulnerable populations, including youth, African Americans, and the LGBT community. NYC Smoke-Free, a program of Public Health Solutions, works to curb menthol cigarette use by educating communities about their harmful impact on health — which is often overlooked. For more information, visit [nycsmokefree.org](http://nycsmokefree.org)

## THE ALLURE OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES

Menthol is a chemical compound extracted from the peppermint, or corn mint, plant that can also be created synthetically. Due to its minty flavor and cooling effect on the mouth and throat, menthol reduces the harshness of cigarette smoke, giving a false sense of “safe smoking”. As a result, menthol cigarettes are an increasingly popular choice among smokers and a common starter tobacco product for young people.

- Menthol cigarettes represent 25% of all cigarettes sold in the U.S.
- More than half of all youth smokers use menthol cigarettes — compared to less than one third of smokers over 25
- Youth menthol smokers have a greater urgency to smoke their first cigarette of the day than traditional cigarette smokers

## MENTHOL CIGARETTES ARE A PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

Despite being considered less harsh than traditional cigarettes, menthol cigarettes are deadly and highly addictive. Menthol smokers are more nicotine dependent and less likely to quit than smokers who use traditional cigarettes. Further, those who smoke menthol cigarettes do so earlier in the morning and more frequently at night.

- Menthol cigarettes contain 30-70% more toxins than non-menthol cigarettes, including tar and nicotine
- Menthol cigarette smokers have lower rates of quitting than traditional cigarette smokers and have higher rates of relapsing when they do quit



## VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED

Vulnerable communities nationwide have been the target of aggressive marketing campaigns focused on menthol cigarettes. Tactics include direct-mail promotions, sponsorships at events and bars within specific communities, and campaigns that use community language and slang. Combined with the allure of mentholated tobacco products, these marketing tactics set vulnerable populations up for a lifetime of addiction. We work to drive policies that cut smoking imagery in movies and strengthen youth rating regulations.

### MENTHOL CIGARETTE USE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS



**85%**  
OF AFRICAN AMERICANS SMOKERS IN NYC USE MENTHOL CIGARETTES — COMPARED TO 22% OF WHITE SMOKERS IN NYC



**70%**  
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SMOKERS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL USE MENTHOL CIGARETTES



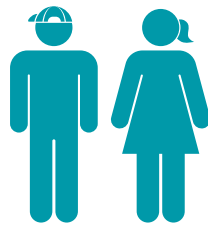
**460,000+**  
AFRICAN AMERICANS ESTIMATED WILL HAVE STARTED SMOKING BECAUSE OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES BY 2020



**22%** OF MENTHOL CIGARETTE USERS ARE WHITE



**36%** OF MENTHOL CIGARETTE USERS ARE LGBT



**57%** OF MENTHOL CIGARETTE USERS ARE YOUTH



**64%** OF MENTHOL CIGARETTE USERS ARE LATINO

Want to learn more about our programs? Visit [healthsolutions.org](http://healthsolutions.org) for locations and contact information.

[www.nycsmokefree.org](http://www.nycsmokefree.org)



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