



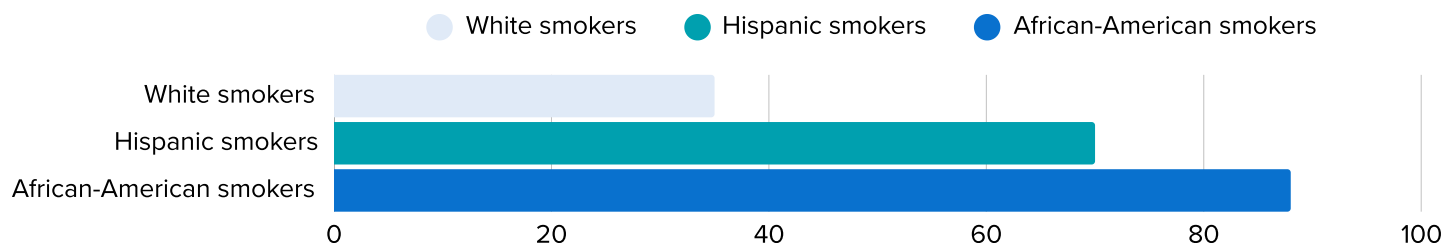
THE ALLURE OF MENTHOL CIGARETTES

Background

Menthol cigarettes hold a strong appeal due to their cooling, minty sensation, which masks the harshness of tobacco and creates a smoother, seemingly less harmful smoking experience. This sensory effect makes menthol products more attractive to first-time smokers, especially youth, and increases nicotine dependence, making it harder to quit. These characteristics, combined with decades of targeted marketing toward African American, LGBTQIA2S+, and youth communities, have led to disproportionately high menthol cigarette use among these populations.

Tobacco companies have invested heavily in market research to fine-tune menthol levels, ensuring the product is as appealing as possible to specific target audiences^[1]. In addition to product manipulation, they use a range of marketing tactics—such as advertisements, giveaways, discounted pricing, lifestyle branding, and event sponsorships—to promote menthol products.

In New York City, although overall adult smoking has declined to about 8–9%, menthol cigarette use remains persistently high. According to 2022 data from the NYC Department of Health, about 52% of adult smokers in the city use menthol cigarettes. The prevalence varies widely by borough: approximately 82% of smokers in the Bronx, 45% in Brooklyn, and 27% in Manhattan report using menthol products. Statewide, around 49–52% of adult smokers use menthols—including 88% of African American smokers, 70% of Hispanic smokers, and 35% of White smokers^[2].



Menthol Tobacco Products: A Public Health Concern

For decades, the tobacco industry has used menthol cigarettes to target vulnerable populations, including youth, African Americans, and the LGBTQIA2s+ community. NYC Smoke-Free, a tobacco control program of Public Health Solutions, works to stop menthol cigarette use by education, advocacy, youth, community engagement, and highlighting their harmful impact on health.

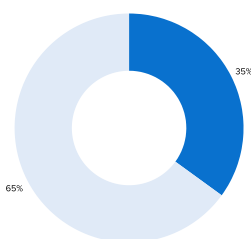
Despite being considered less harsh than traditional cigarettes, menthol cigarettes are deadly and highly addictive. Menthol smokers are more nicotine dependent and less likely to quit than smokers who use traditional cigarettes.

- 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^[3].

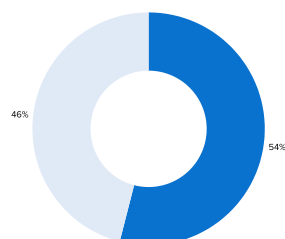
Menthol Tobacco Use Amongst African Americans

80.9% of African American Adult smokers used menthol cigarettes, compared to 43.4% of adult smokers overall. In about three in four (77.4%) African-American smokers, the usual cigarette of choice is menthol, over three times the rate as among white smokers (23.0%).

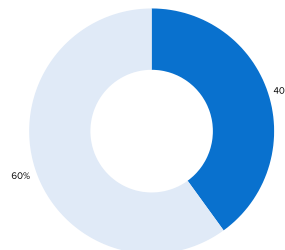
- Menthol cigarettes were responsible for 1.5 million new smokers, 157,000 smoking-related premature deaths and 1.5 million life years lost among African Americans in the U.S., from 1980-2018^[3].
- Newport, a prominent menthol tobacco brand, had almost twice as many price promotions and cheaper prices in neighborhoods with a greater African American youth population.



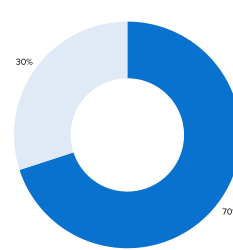
35% white adults smoke menthol cigarettes



54% of lesbian or gay individuals and 49% of bisexual individuals reported menthol use



40% of youth consumed menthol flavored tobacco products in United States (2022)



70% of Menthol users are Hispanic

[1] Smoking and Tobacco Use. "Menthol Tobacco Products," May 15, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/menthol-tobacco/index.html>.

[2] "State Health Department Releases Report Illustrating Persistent Disparities in Menthol Cigarette Use," September 16, 2024. https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2024/2024-09-16_menthol_cigarette_use.htm.

[3] Foulds, J., M. W. Hooper, M. J. Pletcher, and K. S. Okuyemi. "Do Smokers of Menthol Cigarettes Find It Harder to Quit Smoking?" *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* 12, no. Supplement 2 (December 1, 2010): S102–9. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntq166>.

[1] "Tobacco Use in the Black American Community." Truth Initiative, May 28, 2020. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/targeted-communities/tobacco-use-african-americancommunity>.

[1] American Lung Association. "Tobacco Use in Racial and Ethnic Populations," n.d. <https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/smoking-facts/impact-of-tobacco-use/tobacco-use-racial-and-ethnic>.

[1] American Lung Association, "What Is Menthol?," n.d., <https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/smokingfacts/health-effects/what-is-menthol>. [1] New York State Department of Health. Menthol Is Not Just a Flavor: Aggressive Marketing to Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Lower Income Communities Fuels Persistent Disparities in Menthol Cigarette Use (PDF). StatShots, Bureau of Tobacco Control, Volume 16, No. 2, September 2024

[1] Cornelius ME, Gentzke AS, Loretan CG, Hawkins NA, Jamal A. Use of Menthol-Flavored Tobacco Products Among US Middle and High School Students: National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2022. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2024;21:230305. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd21.230305>.