

Banning Menthol Cigarettes Should be Top Priority For FDA

Statement of Robin Koval, CEO & President of Truth Initiative®

We are pleased the FDA has taken an important step toward protecting Americans, particularly youth and young adults, from flavored tobacco products. Banning menthol cigarettes should be the agency's number one priority along with eliminating flavors in other combustible products such as little cigars. While a limited availability of flavors in reduced harm products, such as e-cigarettes, may play a role in encouraging smokers to quit, there is no role for products with youth appealing names such as unicorn vomit, fruit loops or peanut butter and jelly.

As the FDA states in their own request for information, there is overwhelming evidence that menthol is perpetuating the tobacco epidemic – it encourages initiation and addiction, is used disproportionately by youth and minority groups, especially African Americans, and makes it more difficult to quit smoking. In the five years since 2013—the date of the FDA's prior Advance Notice of Proposed Rule Making (ANPRM) on menthol—research has only re-confirmed and strengthened the conclusion that menthol must be banned. Sadly, every day more than 3,200 youth smoke their first cigarette. And young people who initiate using menthol cigarettes are more at risk of becoming regular smokers and dependent on nicotine.

The science is clear, menthol and other flavored combustible products serve no public health benefit and the longer they remain on the market, the more they contribute to the death and disease tobacco inflicts.

As it concerns flavors in e-cigarettes, we recognize that flavors may be helpful in encouraging smokers in their efforts to quit using combustible tobacco. We hope that the ANPRM process will help end the uncontrollable proliferation of flavors that has occurred over the past several years and lead us to a more sensible solution of limited flavor availability in products that are responsibly marketed for the purpose of helping smokers switch completely or ideally quit rather than the current Wild West approach that may have contributed to the continuing rise in e-cigarette use among youth.

We hope that this time the evidence will “stick” and that the FDA will review the comments quickly and issue product standards to protect public health from flavored tobacco products, and menthol cigarettes in particular.