
Youth activists gather in DC to demand action on flavored tobacco products and declare “Nicotine Addiction Shouldn’t Taste Like Candy”

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 19, 2023) – Nearly one year after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed to remove menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars from U.S. markets, youth activists from across the country will come together in the nation’s capital to raise their voices for a future free of flavored tobacco products. As part of the annual **Moment of Action** with [truth](#)[®], the national youth smoking, vaping, and nicotine public education campaign, these young people will call on the FDA to take action to finalize the proposed rules once and for all. This year’s event leverages decades of research to declare loudly that **Nicotine Addiction Shouldn’t Taste Like Candy** – shedding light on the tobacco industry’s continued tactics of using flavors which can attract young people, putting their physical and mental health at risk.

Menthol has been shown to increase the intensity of nicotine’s reinforcing effects and withdrawal symptoms, making it easier to start and harder to quit. More than 40 percent of current high school smokers use menthol cigarettes, and half of all young people who ever tried smoking started with the flavored product. Additionally, nearly 75 percent of youth cigar smokers cite preferred flavors as their reason for choosing to use cigars. Of middle and high school students who use e-cigarettes, nearly 85 percent use flavored products, and among them, 26.6 percent use menthol.

“The historic action of removing menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars from the market has enormous potential to protect our nation’s youth, advance health equity, and save lives,” stated [Robin Koval](#), CEO and President of Truth Initiative, the organization behind the national **truth** campaign. “As these young people have clearly stated, nicotine addiction shouldn’t taste like candy. The tobacco industry has targeted youth with flavored products for decades and continues to do so today, contributing to more than 2.5 million middle and high school students using e-cigarettes last year alone. The hallmark of **truth** is to give young people the facts to make informed decisions in their best interest. The changemakers joining us this week are driving momentum to make a tobacco-free world a reality, and we are honored to stand beside them to lift up their voices on this important issue and to demand action.”

26 young people will rally in downtown Washington, D.C. alongside the **Follow the Flavors truth** truck, which is designed to mirror youthful vape advertising and a menu of familiar sounding flavors like “Bubble Yum Yum” and “Straw Melon Sour.” The activists – including former e-cigarette users – will draw



attention to the impact flavored tobacco products are having. Activists will pass out candy imitating flavorful vape branding on the front and outlining the dangers of flavored e-cigarettes on the back, using a QR code to get involved with **truth** and access a free and anonymous quit vaping text messaging program, [This is Quitting](#).

“I wanted to become a **truth** Ambassador because I saw the effects vaping has on my friends’ daily lives and the toll it takes on their mental health,” said Laila, a 20-year-old activist from Alabama. “I’m proud to be in D.C. for the Moment of Action to raise awareness about the dangers of flavored e-cigarettes and take our message to our elected officials about the importance of keeping these products out of our stores.”

While in Washington, young people will also be meeting with decision makers on Capitol Hill and with senior leaders at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Young people nationwide will get involved in the event locally and on Snapchat and TikTok, where special filters are available.

“One of the reasons I started vaping in high school was because the flavors were so appealing – but I didn’t realize how dangerous they really were,” added Sam, a 22-year-old former e-cigarette user turned **truth** Ambassador from South Carolina. “I’m here because I want to make sure others don’t make the same mistake I did, and so that we can make vaping and flavored products a thing of the past.”

In addition to events in Washington D.C., partners across the country will host their own local events calling attention to the fact that **Nicotine Addiction Shouldn’t Taste like Candy**. Young people interested in learning more or in hosting their own events can visit thetruth.com/flavors.

Resources For Those Looking to Quit

Truth Initiative, the nonprofit public health organization behind the **truth** campaign, is already helping more than 560,000 young people quit with [This is Quitting](#). A randomized clinical trial found that young adults aged 18-24 who used This is Quitting had nearly 40% higher odds of quitting compared to a control group. Teens and young adults can text “**DITCHVAPE**” to **88709** to get immediate help to quit. Resources for parents of young people who vape are available for free at BecomeAnEX.org.



In addition to the national campaign, **truth** continues to raise up the voices of young people who have quit smoking and vaping nicotine through its Quitters initiative, allowing them to tell their stories in their own words and to inspire others to follow their journeys. These stories can be found on **truth**'s [YouTube page](#).

This activation builds on the latest **truth** campaign, [Breath of Stress Air](#), which calls attention to the connection between nicotine and mental health. The campaign directly illustrates how [vaping nicotine can increase feelings of stress](#) and can impact mental health, even as some e-cigarette companies market their products as stress relief. To turn stress air into fresh air, breathing exercises can help with nicotine cravings that cause stress and anxiety. For this reason, **truth** has also launched a partnership with Breathwrk through [This is Quitting](#), and program users can access six months of free membership to [Breathwrk Pro](#) including access to custom breaths to help on their quit journey by texting "BREATHE" to 88709.

Additional resources for young people struggling with mental health or those who want to quit vaping are available at [thetruth.com](#). Additional information about the connection between vaping nicotine, stress and mental health is available at: [truthinitiative.org](#).

About truth®

truth is the longest-running and most successful national tobacco prevention campaign for youth and young adults. The campaign delivers the facts about tobacco use and the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry so that young people can make informed choices and influence others to do the same. We are credited with preventing millions of young people from becoming smokers and are equally committed to achieving the same results in ending the youth e-cigarette epidemic, including by helping young people quit with our first-of-its-kind quit vaping program for teens and young adults *This is Quitting*. **truth** is part of Truth Initiative®, a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where young people reject smoking, vaping, and nicotine. Learn more about **truth** and the organization behind it at [thetruth.com](#) and [truthinitiative.org](#).

About Truth Initiative®

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where all young people reject smoking, vaping and nicotine and a future where tobacco and nicotine addiction are a thing of the past. In 2020, we celebrated 20 years of saving lives and preventing millions of youth from



smoking. Our impact has helped drive the teen smoking rate down from 23% in 2000 to under 3% in 2021. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**[®] public education campaign. As youth e-cigarette use threatens to addict a new generation to nicotine, we are leading the fight against tobacco and nicotine addiction in all forms. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco, and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment are also helping to end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization, formerly known as the American Legacy Foundation, was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit truthinitiative.org.

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