
One year later, Truth Initiative calls on FDA to finalize rules on menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars to protect youth, advance health equity and save lives

Statement by CEO and President Robin Koval

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 28, 2023) – It was [a year ago today](#) that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed rules to remove menthol cigarettes and all flavored cigars from the U.S. marketplace, a historic move to help end the enormous harm resulting from the predatory and deadly practices of the tobacco industry. As we continue to wait for a final rule, Truth Initiative is calling on the FDA to take action without any further delay to get these deadly, flavored combustible products off the market and put the health of Americans over tobacco industry profits in a bold and meaningful way.

Removing menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars from shelves nationwide will protect young people and future generations from nicotine addiction and reduce health inequities, especially among Black Americans. The tobacco industry has used predatory marketing campaigns for decades, luring young people with flavors and targeting Black communities and other populations, leading to 88.5% of Black smokers using menthol products today. Menthol increases the intensity of nicotine’s reinforcing effects and withdrawal symptoms, making it easier to start and harder to quit. As a result, more than 40 percent of current high school smokers use menthol cigarettes, with half of all young people who ever tried smoking starting with this flavored product.

Flavors are also driving the persistent youth e-cigarette crisis – according to the 2022 National Youth Tobacco Survey, of the 2.5 million middle and high school students who use e-cigarettes, nearly 85 percent use flavored products, and among them, 26.6 percent use menthol. Nearly 75 percent of youth cigar smokers cite flavors as their reason for choosing to use cigars.

Since the FDA’s announcement of a proposed rule one year ago, the tobacco industry has worked tirelessly to thwart efforts to take menthol and flavored products off the market. In California, tobacco companies have [repeatedly challenged state and local bans](#) in court, with the Supreme Court declining earlier this year to hear one suit against Los Angeles County’s flavored tobacco product law, and refusing late last year to block California’s law from taking effect. In a flagrant move to evade the California law after it took effect, [R.J. Reynolds](#) has introduced new products that synthetically mimic menthol using descriptors like “cool” and “crisp” to target menthol smokers. And following age-old tactics used



by the industry for years, Black [lawmakers](#) and [community leaders](#) have been offered campaign donations and hundreds of thousands of dollars to oppose policies restricting menthol cigarettes. The companies doing this include RJ Reynolds, whose parent company British American Tobacco has recently been the subject of a massive [\\$629 million penalty](#) to the U.S. government to avoid criminal charges for doing business with North Korea in violation of U.S. sanctions.

It was against this backdrop that youth activists from across the country came to Washington, D.C. last week as part of **truth**'s Moment of Action to declare that "[Nicotine Addiction Shouldn't Taste Like Candy](#)," shedding light on the tobacco industry's continued tactics of using menthol and flavors that can attract young people, putting their physical and mental health at risk. Young changemakers took to the streets of D.C as well as the halls of Capitol Hill and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to call for the FDA to take action on this important issue.

The FDA must move forward with this critical action to remove menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars from the market without further delay, and despite aggressive tobacco industry interference. The industry's blatant hypocrisy of promoting a smoke-free world when doing everything in its power to stop the removal of these deadly products should not be tolerated. Every day of delay costs precious lives and continues to waste the FDA's time and taxpayers' money.

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 2% in 2022. 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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