

White House Delays Finalizing FDA Rules to Prohibit Menthol Cigarettes

ACS CAN says White House must act to reduce tobacco-related cancer disparities and meet Cancer Moonshot goals.

April 29, 2024 By American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

[On Friday, April 26], the White House announced it is indefinitely delaying finalization of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed rule to end the sale of menthol cigarettes, without mention of eliminating all flavors in cigars, despite an overwhelming amount of evidence demonstrating menthol flavoring is a serious public health risk.

“The White House fell for industry rhetoric and, as a result, public health will suffer,” said Dr. Karen E. Knudsen, CEO of the American Cancer Society and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. “For the last two years, the Biden Administration has had the opportunity to take a significant step in their cancer moonshot goal to end cancer as we know it by reducing tobacco use, responsible for more than 30% of all cancer deaths. Today’s announcement that they will not take action anytime soon deals a significant blow to that goal.

“This shocking announcement comes during the same month the White House declared as National Cancer Prevention and Early Detection Month and days before the two-year anniversary of the proposed rules,” said Lisa Lacasse, president of ACS CAN. “With 30% of all cancer deaths due to smoking, it is hard to imagine how the president can meet the goals of the Cancer Moonshot without meaningfully addressing tobacco use.

Big Tobacco has used these products for decades to target Black communities, who, as a result, consistently report the highest prevalence of menthol cigarette use. 83.1% of Black people who smoke using menthol cigarettes, as compared to 56.5% of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander people who smoke, 48% of Hispanic people who smoke, 41.5% of Asian people who smoke and 31.6% of White people who smoke.

Big Tobacco continues to target youth with their cigars, cigarillos, and little cigars which are all sold in appealing flavors such as menthol, banana, mango, grape, Tropical Twist, Purple Swish and chocolate. An estimated 420,000 U.S. students currently used cigars in 2023. Youth who are Black, or Hispanic or Latino are twice as likely to regularly smoke cigars than their White peers. Citing these alarming statistics, 32 members of the Congressional Black Caucus sent a letter to the FDA in August supporting these new rules.

Instead of taking these deadly products off the market, which could save as many as 654,000 lives, including the lives of more than 238,000 African Americans, over the next 40 years, according to modeling studies, the administration is giving the tobacco industry free rein to continue to deepen these disparities and addict a new, younger generation.

“The longer the delay, the more people who get lured into a lifetime of tobacco addiction,” said Lacasse, and added: “The administration should refrain from giving deference and more time to conversations with an industry and groups carrying the message of an industry who benefits from addicting new customers, and instead rely on irrefutable evidence that prohibiting flavors is critical to reducing health disparities and ending cancer as we know it, for everyone.”

Prohibiting menthol in cigarettes and all flavors in cigars would help reduce tobacco initiation among youth and stimulate cessation among adults who smoke, saving lives from tobacco-related diseases like cancer. [Research](#) from the American Cancer Society examined the impact on the sale of cigarettes of a Massachusetts law that restricted the sale of all flavored tobacco products in the state and found that this action decreased the sale of menthol cigarettes, contributing to a reduction in overall cigarette sales.

For more than a decade, ACS CAN has been urging the FDA to prohibit menthol cigarettes as part of our ongoing call to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products. ACS CAN once again calls on the White House to commit to its Cancer Moonshot goal and take meaningful action to reduce tobacco-related cancers. ACS CAN will continue its work with federal, state and local lawmakers to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products. Our ability to continue to make progress against cancer relies on implementation of evidence-based tobacco control policies and programs, which prevent youth and young adults from becoming addicted to tobacco products and help individuals who currently use these products to quit.

For more information, please visit <https://www.fightcancer.org/what-we-do/tobacco-control>.

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