



Menthol Is Not Just a Flavor: Aggressive Marketing to Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Lower Income Communities Fuels Persistent Disparities in Menthol Cigarette Use

The tobacco industry aggressively markets its deadly products to specific people, including members of the Black community, members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) communities, women, youth, and people living in urban and lower-income communities.¹ Even more insidious is the targeted marketing of menthol cigarettes to these population groups.^{2,3} The cooling flavor makes menthol cigarettes easier to start and harder to quit smoking.⁴ Adults who are current smokers and use menthol cigarettes are less likely than non-menthol smokers to successfully quit smoking despite increased quit intentions and quit attempts.⁵ Studies show that people who are Black/African American and Hispanic menthol smokers have significantly lower quit rates compared with non-menthol smokers.⁵ As stated by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Menthol cigarettes — including how and to whom they are marketed and sold — are a significant risk to public health and efforts to advance health equity. They increase smoking initiation and dependence, make it harder for people to quit, and contribute to health disparities.”⁶

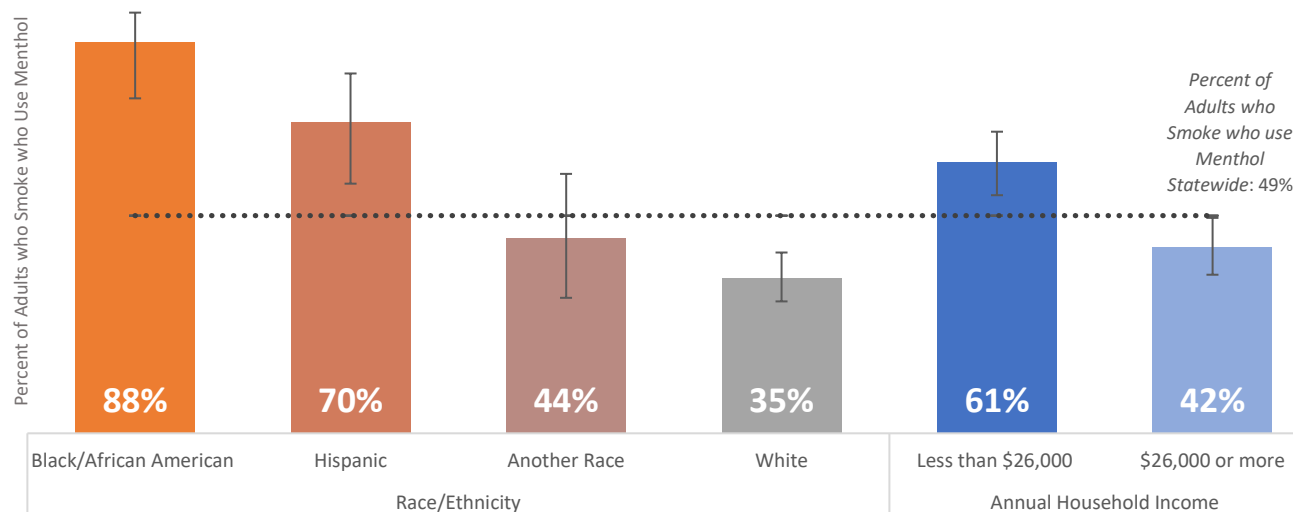
Data from the 2021 and 2022 New York Adult Tobacco Survey show persistent disparities in the usual use of menthol cigarettes. Among adults who smoke cigarettes, 49% report they usually smoke menthols. Menthol cigarette use was highest among adults who smoke who identify as Black or African American (88%) and those who identify as Hispanic (70%); it was lowest among those who identify as White (35%) or as another race (44%). Of adults who smoke, use of menthol cigarettes was higher among adults reporting an annual household income less than \$26,000 (61%) compared to those with incomes of \$26,000 or more (42%).

Public Health Opportunity

With over 8 million tobacco-related deaths a year globally, and 30,000 deaths per year in New York, tobacco use continues to be a significant public health threat and tobacco control remains a health priority.^{7,8} Interventions that curb marketing of these products, such as regulatory action and community mobilization, will help address this critical public health and health equity issue.

- State and local public health professionals should promote effective interventions to reduce tobacco use, focusing on communities that are disproportionately impacted. This includes policies that prohibit, restrict, or reduce the sales of menthol tobacco products. Sales restrictions on flavored tobacco products, including menthol products, are gaining momentum at all levels of government and most New York adults support these policies.⁹
- Health systems and health care providers should increase equitable access to evidence-based quitting resources, including counseling and medication while emphasizing culturally sensitive quit coaching.

Percentage of New York Adults Who Usually Smoke Menthol Cigarettes, Among Adults Who Currently Smoke, by Race/Ethnicity and Income, New York Adult Tobacco Survey, 2021–2022 pooled



Source: NY Adult Tobacco Survey (pooled 2021–2022). Contact the New York State Department of Health at tcp@health.ny.gov. StatShots can be accessed online at: http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/tobacco_control/reports/statshots/

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