

Fact Sheet #15 : Young Adults and Flavored Tobacco

18-29 year olds have long been the youngest legal targets of the tobacco industry. Flavored tobacco products are just the latest weapon in the tobacco industry's arsenal.

What Is Happening?

- A number of tobacco products are flavored, including chew tobacco, cigarettes, and bidis. These products vary in target audience and purpose. Flavored cigarettes often marketed as a premium product, whereas almost all shisha tobacco in the U.S. has flavoring of some kind.
- Some of the more interesting flavors added to tobacco include: double apple, chocolate, bourbon, clove, and menthol.
- Some cigarettes add the flavor to their products by inserting "flavor pellets" directly into the filter. The contents of these pellets is unknown.¹
- In 2004, the Roswell Park Cancer Institute conducted surveys with young people about their use of flavored cigarettes. They found:
 - 20% of smokers ages 17-19 had used flavored cigarettes in the last 30 days.
 - Only 6% of smokers 25+ had.²

Menthol

Menthol flavoring was introduced to cigarette consumers as far back as the 1920's, as a way to mellow the harsh taste of early, unfiltered cigarettes. Through the 50's, menthol cigarettes were advertised as having a distinct medicinal advantage. Up to 1956, menthols were marketed as the cigarette to be used if a cold or throat irritation prevented a smoker from using their preferred brand.³ Today, menthol is so integrated into cigarette products that it is frequently exempted from attempts to restrict the sale of flavored cigarettes.⁴

Menthol cigarettes have a disproportionately negative effect on the African American community. 75% of African American smokers prefer menthol cigarettes.⁵ Newport is the second most popular brand with young adults and the most popular brand with African Americans.⁵ African Americans bear a higher burden of tobacco-related disease and death, despite smoking less cigarettes per day than other ethnic groups, according to the American Heart Association.⁶ Menthol cigarette makers continue to market to this population, with elaborate campaigns online, in bars and nightclubs. Menthol cigarettes must be a priority for tobacco control advocates working with young adults.

The Future of Flavor Country

Young adults who smoke are more likely to define themselves as social smokers than any other age group. Young adulthood is a time of transition and change, where the habits of youth can become addictions sustained throughout a lifetime. The tobacco industry is constantly developing new products to lure new smokers and increase the tobacco use of occasional smokers.

Flavored cigarettes are the new gateway product - intended to not only initiate cigarette smoking, but also facilitate the transition between occasional smoking and everyday use. Additionally, these products can also be attractive to youth, with flavors similar to candy and soft drinks. In October 2006, RJR Reynolds, maker of the Camel Exotic Blends cigarettes, entered an agreement with 38 Attorneys General to stop manufacturing and selling such cigarettes. However, this agreement has conditions which allow RJR to make other kinds of flavored cigarettes in the future, and does not prohibit the sale of menthol flavored cigarettes.⁷ Other tobacco manufacturers, such as Altria, continue to market and sell new and innovative flavored tobacco products, including shisha and snus. The flavoring of tobacco products is not an activity that will come to an end voluntarily, but instead will require intervention in the form of new regulation and community education.



¹ "Young Adults and Flavored Cigarettes: A Bad Combination" NCI Cancer Bulletin. 14 March 2006. Available at www.cancer.gov/ncicancerbulletin/NCI_Cancer_Bulletin_031406/page4.

² Lewis M, Wackowski O. Dealing With an Innovative Industry: A Look at Flavored Cigarettes Promoted by Mainstream Brands. *Am J Public Health*. 2006;96(2): 244-251.

³ Gardiner P. The African Americanization of Menthol Cigarette Use in the United States. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*. 2004;6(1):S55-S65.

⁴ FDA Regulation of Tobacco Products: Why It's Needed and What It Will Do. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Available at www.tobaccofreekids.org/reports/fda/summary.shtml.

⁵ Cigarette Brand Preferences. The NHSDA Report. 11 July 2003. Available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k3/cigBrands/cigBrands.htm>.

⁶ Tobacco Industry's Targeting of Youth, Minorities, and Women. American Heart Association. Available at www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=11226.

⁷ American Legacy Foundation Statement on Flavored Cigarettes. American Legacy Foundation. Available at www.americanlegacy.org/680.htm.

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