



## Eliminating Tobacco Flavors

### The American Heart Association's Position

The removal of all characterizing flavors other than tobacco from all tobacco products is essential for reducing their appeal to youth. Controversy arises because, while there is no experimental evidence to support that flavors help adults switch from combustible to non-combustible tobacco products or to quit tobacco altogether, there are individual reports suggesting that for some adults, flavors are appealing. However, maintaining flavors to attract adult smokers increases the risk of these products being available for youth and young adults. Additional research is needed to determine how best to balance the need to reduce flavorings' appeal to kids and young adults with the potential that flavorings may facilitate switching or smoking cessation among adult smokers.

Based upon our assessment of the evidence available today, the American Heart Association supports FDA and state and local governments banning the use of all characterizing flavors other than tobacco in all tobacco products. In the future, we might reconsider how flavorings could be integrated into non-combustible products for the purposes of facilitating smoking cessation if there is adequate independently verified research supporting efficacy and they can be marketed in such a way to prevent youth access and initiation. The American Heart Association supports legislation that bans all characterizing flavors, including menthol at the local, state and federal levels. At the federal level, the association also recognizes and promotes FDA's authority to ban and regulate these flavors. Emerging evidence suggests that sweeteners in tobacco products may play a role in increasing appeal of the tobacco product. Accordingly, FDA should consider including high-intensity sweeteners in their definition of "characterizing flavors."

#### Fast Facts:

1. The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009 banned characterizing flavors in cigarettes, except for menthol, but did not address flavors in other tobacco products.
2. There is overwhelming evidence that flavors attract youth. One study showed that the first tobacco product used by 81% of youth is a flavored tobacco product.<sup>1</sup>
3. The number of flavors in newer tobacco products has increased substantially in recent years with industry marketing thousands of youth-enticing flavors such as fruit, candy, vanilla, unicorn, and mint-flavored products.<sup>2, 3</sup> Menthol and other flavors reduce the harsh sensation of tobacco in the mouth and throat, increasing appeal, nicotine exposure and dependence.<sup>2, 3</sup>
4. More than 80% of African-American smokers use menthol cigarettes compared to less than 30% of Caucasian smokers and recent research has identified genetic variation in African-Americans that may make them more susceptible to using mentholated tobacco products.<sup>4</sup>

**Impact:** In 2017, San Francisco passed the most stringent flavored tobacco product ban in the US, eliminating all flavored e-cigarette liquids, cigars, and hookah. The American Heart Association and our partners fought hard first to pass the ordinance through the city council, then defend it when the tobacco industry funded an effort to put it on the ballot. Voters were heard loud and clear when they overwhelmingly voted to keep the ban. Approximately 10 cities in California and the city of Minneapolis have banned the sale of menthol cigarettes.

For more information and resources from the American Heart Association's policy research department on tobacco please visit: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/policy-research>.

1. Villanti AC, Johnson AL, Ambrose BK, Cummings KM, Stanton CA, Rose SW, Feirman SP, Tworek C, Glasser AM, Pearson JL, Cohn AM, Conway KP, Niaura RS, Bansal-Travers M and Hyland A. Flavored Tobacco Product Use in Youth and Adults: Findings From the First Wave of the PATH Study (2013-2014). *Am J Prev Med.* 2017;53:139-151.
2. Dai H and Hao J. Flavored Electronic Cigarette Use and Smoking Among Youth. *Pediatrics.* 2016;138
3. Morean ME, Butler ER, Bold KW, Kong G, Camenga DR, Cavallo DA, Simon P, O'Malley SS and Krishnan-Sarin S. Preferring more e-cigarette flavors is associated with e-cigarette use frequency among adolescents but not adults. *PLoS One.* 2018;13:e0189015.
4. Kozlitina, J. Risso, D., et al., An African-specific haplotype in *MRGPRX4* is associated with menthol cigarette smoking. *PLOS Genetics.* February 15, 2019.