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**Tobacco Free NYS kicks off 2022 It’s Not Just campaign focused on menthol-flavored tobacco products that attract and addict youth**

More than half of youth who smoke use menthol cigarettes

**ALBANY, N.Y.** – Tobacco Free NYS announced the kick off of its statewide 2022 “It’s Not Just” campaign, intended to educate people across New York State about the tobacco industry’s historically inequitable marketing and promotion of menthol-flavored tobacco products. The It’s Not Just campaign speaks from the youth perspective, blending powerful imagery with direct quotes by tobacco executives to highlight the striking contrast between how the industry views youth and how youth see themselves. It is an extension of the campaign launched in May 2021 to urge the public to take action against the hard-hitting menthol-flavored tobacco product marketing that has targeted and harmed Black communities for decades.

The tobacco industry tracks the behaviors and preferences of youth under 21 because it sees “today’s teenager as tomorrow’s potential regular customer.” 1 To mask the harshness of smoke, tobacco companies use flavor, like menthol, in their products to make them more appealing to new users, almost all of whom are under 18.2 In fact, nearly 81% of youth who have ever tried tobacco started with a flavored product, and more than half (54%) of youth ages 12-17 years who smoke use menthol cigarettes.3,4 However, menthol is not just a flavor. It attracts and addicts youth, making it easier for them to start and harder for them to quit.5 And, it’s not just an injustice, it poses a serious health threat to today’s youth.

Youth who initiate using menthol cigarettes are more likely to become addicted and become long-term daily smokers.2 Furthermore, nicotine exposure and addiction can prime the adolescent brain for other addictions and substances.6 When New York State ended the sale of flavored e-cigarettes statewide in May 2020, it was a significant step toward reducing youth tobacco use. However, other flavored tobacco products, such as combustible menthol cigarettes, continue to present an obstacle to decreasing tobacco use among young people and underserved populations.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States and worldwide.7 According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 5.6 million of today’s Americans younger than 18 will die early from smoking-related illness if the current rate of youth smoking continues.8,9 Even more shocking, every adult who dies early due to smoking is replaced by two new young smokers.9

Individuals can learn more about how to help fight the injustice of menthol-flavored tobacco products at the campaign’s website: [NotJustMenthol.org](https://notjustmenthol.org/).

Additional statistics:

* Menthol and tobacco marketing
* Tobacco companies have a long history of developing and marketing flavored tobacco products as “starter” products that attract kids.3,12
* Tobacco companies market menthol cigarettes as “smoother” than other cigarettes.4,14
* Documents from the tobacco industry show that the industry studied smokers’ menthol preferences and manipulated menthol levels to appeal to adolescents and young adults. 10
* Research shows that the tobacco industry attracted new smokers by promoting cigarettes with lower menthol content, which is popular among adolescents and young adults.10
* Tobacco companies spend $8.4 billion each year to promote their deadly products, much of which directly reaches and influences kids.11
* Menthol usage and addiction
* Menthol cigarettes lead to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction and decreased success in quitting smoking.2
* Menthol cools and numbs the throat, reducing the harshness of cigarette smoke, making menthol cigarettes more appealing to youth.2
* Over 7 out of 10 African American youth ages 12-17 years who smoke use menthol cigarettes. 15,16
* Health impact
  + Menthol cigarettes are not less harmful than other cigarettes, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has found that they are likely a greater risk to public health than non-menthol cigarettes.4
  + Researchers estimate that if a menthol ban had gone into effect in 2011, 320,000 smoking-attributed deaths would have been averted by 2050.5,13
  + Menthol cigarette smokers are as likely to experience premature morbidity and mortality as non-menthol cigarette smokers.13

**Support is available for New Yorkers who want to quit**

The New York State Smokers' Quitline is a confidential service for all New York State residents who wish to overcome tobacco use, including e-cigarettes. Free offerings include individualized coaching and assistance with quit-planning from highly trained Quit Coaches, text and chat support, and free shipping of stop-smoking medications such as nicotine patches or nicotine gum for those 18 and older. Residents of all ages may contact the Quitline for support and educational materials. In addition, the Quitline encourages teens and young adults (ages 13-24) to text “DROPTHEVAPE” to 88709 to join This Is Quitting, a free texting support program for help with quitting vaping. Visit [nysmokefree.com](http://nysmokefree.com) anytime for more information or call 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487) seven days a week, beginning at 9 a.m.

Tobacco Free New York State and Reality Check student groups around the state have worked tirelessly to educate local communities on the tobacco industry’s use of menthol and other flavored tobacco products as a tool to target, attract and addict new smokers. Tobacco Free New York State, including the Reality Check student youth groups, is part of the NYS Tobacco Control Program.

**About Tobacco Free NYS**

The New York State Tobacco Control Program funds 21 community organizations across the state to work toward Advancing Tobacco-Free Communities. We educate community leaders and the public about the dangers and social injustice of tobacco marketing and engage local stakeholders to promote community changes that limit the tobacco industry’s presence, de-normalize tobacco use and eliminate secondhand smoke. Find out more at tobaccofreenys.org.

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