

Menthol cigarettes linked to increased smoking among teens

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

Teens who use menthol cigarettes smoke more cigarettes per day than their peers who smoke non-menthols, says a new study. The findings from the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact at the University of Waterloo mark the first time that menthol cigarettes have been directly linked to elevated nicotine addiction among youth in Canada.

"The appeal of menthol cigarettes among youth stems from the perception that they are less harmful than regular cigarettes. The minty taste helps mask the noxious properties, but the reality is that they are just as dangerous as any unflavoured cigarette," said Sunday Azagba, a scientist at Propel and lead author on the paper.

Published in *Cancer Causes and Control*, the study found that menthol users smoked an average of 43 cigarettes a week, close to double the 26 smoked by non-menthol users. The study also found that menthol smokers were almost three times more likely to report that they intend to continue smoking in the next year.

Despite the well-documented health risks associated with tobacco use, almost one in 10 Canadian high school students from Grades 10 to 12 are current smokers. Research shows that the majority of long-term adult smokers start smoking during their adolescence. The national Youth Smoking Survey has found that 32 per cent of smokers in [high school](#) smoke menthols.

"There is a growing concern that the high popularity of menthol cigarettes among youth may hinder the recent progress in preventing other young people from smoking because many of them may experiment with menthol rather than unflavoured brands," said Azagba.

In July 2010, Canada implemented a ban on the sale of most flavoured cigarettes, little cigars and blunt wraps, but not menthol. Alberta is the only province to include a ban on menthol cigarettes in provincial legislation, though it is not yet in force. In April 2014, the European Union (EU) adopted a new Tobacco Products Directive that will see all 28 EU countries implement a ban on menthol cigarettes.

"Our findings indicate that [youth smoking of menthol cigarettes](#) is a serious concern," said Azagba. "It's clear moving forward that we need new laws to ban all added flavours in all tobacco products."

Provided by University of Waterloo

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