Menthol Cigarette Ban Could Save 6,000 Black Lives a Year

The American Medical Association supports a ban on menthol cigarettes, which could save up to 654,000 lives worldwide over 40 years.

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The American Medical Association (AMA) joined a 2020 lawsuit to compel the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to enact a ban on menthol-flavored cigarettes.

Smoking-related illnesses are the leading causes of death among Black people, and the majority of African Americans who smoke use menthol cigarettes. In a recent news release, AMA president Gerald Harmon, MD, said such a ban was long overdue.

“For far too long, tobacco companies have used menthol-flavored products to prey on young people, particularly Black youth,” Harmon said.

If the 167-page proposed rule goes into effect, the FDA anticipates that within the next 40 years, smoking will drop 15.1%, effectively saving 324,000 to 654,000 lives. The FDA expects that among African Americans, between 92,000 and 238,000 smoking-related deaths would be averted—up to nearly 6,000 Black lives annually.

The proposed rule acknowledges that tobacco manufacturers have targeted under-resourced Black communities and Black youth via free samples, discount offers, advertising in bars and night clubs and selling packs containing fewer cigarettes at a lower price.

The 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act banned all but menthol and tobacco as flavors in cigarettes but authorized the FDA to ban menthol if research showed it would benefit public health (which it later did). However, the AMA promptly adopted policy to oppose the exemption of menthol from the tobacco-flavor ban.

Following the failed ban, two anti-smoking organizations—the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council and Action on Smoking and Health—sued the Department of Health and Human Services and the FDA to encourage action. Before long, the National Medical Association and the AMA joined the lawsuit.

The government attempted to have the case dismissed, but its motion was denied. The case is still

pending the FDA’s declaration of the terms of the rule.

Learn more, read “Black and Latino Churches Launch Anti-Tobacco Youth Initiative.”

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