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We need more than a ban on menthol cigarettes to curb smoking rates

By Cliff Douglas

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is poised to take its biggest action yet to lower smoking rates by banning menthol cigarettes. But without providing a robust off-ramp to support menthol cigarette smokers who might quit, the effort will fall short of projections for the number of lives that could be saved. In 2022, the FDA proposed regulations that would ban the manufacturing and sale of menthol-flavored cigarettes and all flavored cigars as part of its commitment to decreasing deaths from tobacco use and improving health equity. I was pleased to see that the agency cited a study that I and several colleagues published in 2021, which employed the science of modeling to determine that a ban on menthol cigarettes would likely avert 650,000 deaths by 2060 through greater smoking cessation. The White House and the FDA said earlier this year that they planned to finalize the ban this month.

Menthol cigarettes contain a minty, soothing flavor. Scientists have shown this flavor makes it easier to tolerate the harsh sensation of inhaling smoke. They are the only non-tobacco flavored cigarettes available, and make up more than a third of the U.S. cigarette market.

Menthol cigarettes are also overwhelmingly popular among Black people who smoke, who consequently disproportionately suffer most of the serious illness and premature death caused by these products. Canada has already banned menthol cigarettes, demonstrating that the regulation could save hundreds of thousands of lives.

But crucially, our modeling assumes that people who smoke menthol cigarettes would be able to access sufficient tools to help them quit – including menthol-flavored e-cigarettes. Nearly two years after the FDA issued the regulations that would ban menthol cigarettes, the agency has yet to authorize a single non-tobacco-flavored e-cigarette. Curiously, it chose to disregard this aspect of our study. This failure of action could severely weaken the anticipated

impact of the menthol cigarette ban. Some of my colleagues and I submitted a formal comment on the FDA's proposed rule noting this discrepancy in August of last year. We fear that without additional reduced risk products being authorized for sale, many of the people who smoke

menthol cigarettes will switch to traditional tobacco cigarettes instead of switching to far safer alternative nicotine products. Such an outcome could have devastating social justice consequences for Black people, as well as millions of people living with lower incomes, fewer years of education, members of the LGBTQ+ community, members of the military or veterans, or those living with mental health or substance use conditions. Smoking rates are higher in all of these populations in general. The FDA's charge is to authorize tobacco products that it deems "appropriate for the protection of public health." It should be able to regulate alternative, reduced-risk nicotine products in a way that supports people who smoke and are trying to quit and protects young people and adults who have never smoked from beginning to use nicotine. Both goals align with the agency's mission to protect public health from tobacco-related death and disease.

Yet FDA's current regulation of reduced-risk nicotine products like e-cigarettes seem to heavily prioritize youth, leaving adults who smoke with painfully few new options to reduce their risk and live longer, healthier lives. In thus far rejecting every menthol flavored e-cigarette presented to it for possible sales the FDA has cited concerns that the risks of youth uptake are too great compared to the supposedly unknown benefits of these products for adults who smoke. This is simply not true: In addition to what the agency already



knows from our study, on which it selectively relied, this year a major meta-analysis found that e-cigarettes are superior to traditional nicotine replacement therapies in helping smokers quit, demonstrating their clear benefit. Additionally, recent research from Yale University suggests that with only tobacco flavored e-cigarettes available, more adult nicotine users would choose to smoke cigarettes.

The FDA has the chance to make history by finalizing this life-saving product standard banning menthol cigarettes, but it will fall short of its lofty goals if it cannot support adults who want to quit smoking. Nicotine replacement therapies are

proven to be safe smoking cessation aids, but they do not work for most people. And, simply put, falling short in this instance will cost more lives, with some of the most disadvantaged members of our society suffering the most.

Adults who want to quit smoking deserve better resources, just as our youth deserve to be protected from nicotine addiction. Currently, the FDA is prioritizing only the latter. The result would be a massive social injustice.

<https://www.smokefree->

[world.org/we-need-more-than-a-ban-on-menthol-cigarettes-to-curb-smoking-rates/](https://www.world.org/we-need-more-than-a-ban-on-menthol-cigarettes-to-curb-smoking-rates/)

Data indicating negative consequences of vape flavour bans

In a recent survey conducted by Red C Research and Marketing in Ireland, one in five ex-smokers who had switched to vaping, said they were likely to revert back to smoking if flavoured vapes were banned. In fact, 75% of the participants said that in their opinion banning flavours was likely to lead to an increase in youth smoking.

As of last December, in Ireland it has been illegal to sell nicotine-containing vapes to individuals under 18 years old. Yet despite these age restrictions, plans for additional limits on the flavours permitted for sale are underway.

Commissioned by Respect Vapers, a group advocating for vaping as a smoking cessation tool, the survey found that 90% of vapers also believe a ban on flavours could fuel a black market for the products. This argument has been consistently backed both by experts in the field, as well as by real-world data in places where such bans have been set already. Nearly half of the respondents stated they would seek flavoured products from sources outside of Ireland if such a ban were implemented, and 71% expressed concerns that smokers would be less inclined to switch to vaping for smoking cessation. Meanwhile, about 37% of respondents would support a ban on flavours that appeal specifically to younger individuals, such as beverage, energy drink-style, candy, or dessert flavours.

In line with previous findings, an overwhelming majority of refillable vapes' users (constituting more than half of all vapers) credited flavours with helping them quit smoking altogether. One in five vapers indicated they would revert back to smoking if flavours were banned, while almost two-thirds of dual users (smokers and vapers) stated they would just stick to smoking cigarettes. In fact, 98% of ex-smokers surveyed credited vaping with aiding their smoking cessation efforts, with 85% reporting a reduction in the number of cigarettes smoked.

Why are vape flavours important?

On discussing vape flavour bans with smoking cessation expert Dr. Colin Mendelsohn, the physician explained that vape flavours are also beneficial in helping former smokers slowly dissociate themselves from tobacco. "In my experience many smokers switching to vaping start with tobacco flavour as it is familiar, but most to switch to other flavours later. Other flavours are more enjoyable, remind them less of smoking." He reiterated that the availability of flavours is linked to higher smoking cessation rates. "For some, flavours are an important incentive to switch. They are also associated with higher quit rates, greater enjoyment and reduced relapse. Restricting flavours leads to increased smoking for adults and youth, increased black market purchases and workarounds such as home mixing.

Overall, flavours are important and a reasonable range should be available. But we should

- Prohibit descriptive flavour names, images and packaging that specifically appeal to youth eg 'dragon vomit'

- Prohibit flavours found to have a material risk to health"

To ban or not to ban? The answer is more complex than most think. Sharing the same sentiment, tobacco harm reduction expert David Sweanor recently emphasized the importance of systematically considering the possible risks of such bans. "It is hard to think of any other public health measure [referring to vape flavour bans] that would have as dramatic an impact and can be so easily achieved as getting people to cease cigarette smoking. Any barriers put in their way should be carefully weighed in terms of the additional premature deaths that will result.

If a politician initially succumbs to sloganeering about 'youth' and thinks draconian market interventions that make vaping a less viable alternative to cigarette smoking might protect youth, they should do a proper policy analysis. That means looking at the risk of diverting of youth to cigarette use, the impact of losing parents and grandparents to death and disability due to continued smoking, the exposure of those youth to unnecessary second-hand smoke and house fires, and the continued family financial strain from cigarette purchases." In line with Sweanor's arguments, studies have consistently shown how counterproductive such measures can be. In 2020 Florida's state legislature passed a bill aimed at banning vape flavours. However, the bill was ultimately rejected following concerns raised by public health experts, who argued that the bill would not only harm the vaping industry but would also deprive smokers of safer alternatives, making it harder for them to quit cigarettes and dissuading others from switching.

In his veto message, Governor DeSantis had explained that although the bill was initially intended to raise the legal age to buy tobacco to 21, it effectively prohibited tobacco-free vaping flavours used by many Floridians as a safer alternative to cigarettes. Subsequent data had confirmed that the Governor had taken the right decision.

Former smokers who switch to flavoured vapes are more likely to quit smoking. Research has shown that youth vaping rates in Florida are declining, and more smokers are quitting using vapes than any other nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). Recent research from the Yale School of Public Health revealed that adult vapers who use flavours are more likely to quit smoking than those who use tobacco flavours. "Our youth are important, and policies to protect their wellbeing deserve to be thoughtful rather than knee-jerk," concluded Sweanor.

Taken from vapingpost.com

WHO urged to embrace safer nicotine alternatives to save 100 million lives

The World Health Organization (WHO) has today been urged to embrace safer alternatives to cigarettes in order to save 100 million lives that will otherwise be lost to smoking. Dr Derek Yach, a global health consultant who led WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative during development of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control was previously president and founder of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, says: "The WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) has not kept pace with scientific and technological advancements.

"Over 120 million people worldwide, in seeking a path away from combustible cigarettes, have turned to safer alternatives, such as e-cigarettes, oral nicotine pouches and heated tobacco products. Evidence suggests that these alternatives improve quit attempts compared to traditional nicotine-replacement therapy³.

"Yet, the FCTC's current emphasis on bans, prohibitions and regulations undermines access to these safer alternatives for millions of tobacco users. It is time to recognize their potential and prioritize harm reduction."

Dr Yach, who has written to The Lancet in response to the 20th anniversary of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: hard won progress amid evolving challenges - The Lancet, sets out a three-point plan that could result in potentially 100 million fewer premature deaths between

2025 and 2060:

Incorporate Tobacco Harm Reduction: The FCTC should actively promote safer alternatives, recognizing their role in reducing harm.

Balanced Regulation: While regulation is necessary, it should not stifle innovation or limit access to safer products.

Science-Based Policies: Governments must base decisions on evidence, fostering independence and informed choices.

"We cannot afford to wait for a miracle," he says. "The WHO must adapt swiftly to the changing landscape of tobacco use and embrace innovative strategies to protect public health." Dr Yach disputes Kelly Lee and colleagues' contention that tobacco companies' development of safer alternative is purely profit-driven.

"Negotiations leading to the FCTC's adoption were intricate and delicate, resulting in nearly all major tobacco producers (except the USA and Indonesia) becoming signatories," Dr Yach says. "Rather than demonizing these legacy companies, we should acknowledge their evolving stance. Many are actively shifting away from combustible cigarettes, embracing safer alternatives as technology evolves⁴.

"Saving lives requires bold action. Let us unite in our commitment to a smoke-free future—one where harm reduction leads the way."

<https://www.tobaccoharmreduction.net/en/article/world-health-organization-urged-to-embrace-safer-nicotine-alternatives-to-save-100-million-lives>

Government action needed on smoking cessation and regulation of tobacco harm reduction products

ISLAMABAD: Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partners have called upon the federal and provincial governments to ensure the availability of smoking cessation services as a human right and appropriately regulate tobacco harm reduction products to make Pakistan a smoke-free country over the next decade.

"With the new governments in place in Islamabad and the provinces, ending combustible smoking should be a priority," said Arshad Ali Syed, project director of ARI, in a statement.

He said the role of the provincial governments is critical in the journey to achieving the

smoke-free status. "With health now a provincial subject, the new governments in the provinces should take the lead on tobacco control."

Arshad called for legislation by the provincial legislatures on tobacco control, saying Pakistan has not witnessed any law beyond the Prohibition of Smoking in Enclosed Places and Protection of Non-smokers Health Ordinance 2002. He added that science and research has opened new avenues on ending combustible smoking. "Unfortunately, Pakistan's tobacco

control policies and initiatives have not moved forward with the developments in science."

Arshad said the new federal and provincial governments should focus on ensuring the availability of smoking cessation services as a human right.

"This will ensure adult smokers, who have been unable to quit, have access to cessation services."

Tobacco harm reduction products, he said, have been part of the developed countries' plans to end combustible smoking. He said Sweden is the first country to become smoke-free. A country is smoke free when the number of adult smokers falls below five percent. Sweden will be the first to

reach its goal. In the last 15 years, the smoking rate in Sweden has come down from 15.6% to 5.6%.

"Nicotine pouches known as Snus have been a crucial part of Sweden's journey to becoming smoke-free," he said.

He said tobacco harm products are being legally sold in Pakistan. "At present there is a regulatory vacuum regarding THR products. The federal and provincial governments should regulate them appropriately, that is, in line with the risks they pose."



The U.S. remains politically divided on vaping products

The U.S. remains politically divided on vaping products, with democrats and republicans Pushing in Different Directions A group of left-wing US senators focused on combating youth vaping, are urging major convenience store chains to remove unauthorized vaping products from their shelves. Sadly, their efforts overlook the growing data on both youth and adult e-cigarette use in the country, more specifically the increasing number of adults relying on vapes to stay smoke-free, as well as the declining youth vaping rates.

In fact, teen vaping in states represented by these same lawmakers have declined, while adult rates have increased, highlighting the need for a shift in focus towards reducing smoking-related harm among adults. The senators' anti-vaping crusade fails to address the reality of declining youth vaping rates and hinders access to e-cigarettes for adults seeking smoke-free alternatives.

In contrast, a group of nearly 70 House Republican led by Rep. Richard Hudson, have urged President Joe Biden to expedite the approval process for smoke-free tobacco products through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in order to provide more options for smokers seeking to quit.

They emphasized that the FDA's delay in approving these products not only limits choices for American smokers but also contributes to the influx of illicit nicotine-containing products from markets like China, which often target youth. The letter highlights the potential of smoke-free products to help smokers quit based on scientific research.

Since the FDA began regulating vapes in 2016, only 23 vaping products have been authorized through the PMTA process, while thousands remain in regulatory limbo. And despite over 26 million applications since 2009, only 50 novel nicotine products have been approved, with fewer than 10 available commercially in the US. While ironically, during the same period the FDA has authorized thousands of combustible tobacco products, despite the fact that their risk profile is undeniably worse than that of vapes. This disparity in product approvals is a joke.

The lawmakers urged the administration to push the FDA to review smoke-free product applications more effectively based on sound science. While acknowledging the risk of underage use, they emphasized that restricting access to products proven effective in smoking cessation is not the solution. The letter comes after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for stronger regulation of products like Zyn nicotine pouches, prompting conservative lawmakers to argue for their potential in improving public health.

American smokers need every option they can get Rep. Hudson criticized the FDA for delays in approving alternative products, reiterating the need for swift action to provide Americans with more choices. The Biden administration's previous plans, including a potential menthol cigarette ban, have faced criticism for concerns over illicit sales and

inconsistent enforcement. At least 58 lawmakers have signed the letter, co-led by Reps. Brett Guthrie and Morgan Griffith. Studies have consistently shown that vaping products present a shift away from combustion, offering a safer alternative to smoking endorsed by numerous Western countries and major health groups. While harsh federal regulations and advocacy against vaping risk increasing cigarette sales. It's time for policymakers to prioritize harm reduction and support adults in their efforts to quit smoking, rather than continuing efforts that restrict access to potentially life-saving products.

[Taken from vapingpost.com](https://www.vapingpost.com)

Pakistan ranks 7th among tobacco consuming countries globally

SLAMABAD: Pakistan is one of the top tobacco consuming countries standing at the 7th position globally and first in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) in terms of the number of tobacco product users.

Experts shared these figures during an interaction with newsmen here in the federal capital.

According to the experts, the cigarette consumption is increasing in developing countries and Pakistan is no exception and has witnessed an upsurge in recent years. Instead of generating additional revenue from the cigarette industry, the country has incurred billions in losses, both in terms of revenue and increased health costs.

According to an estimate, the country produces more than 60 billion sticks of cigarettes every year. Contrary to this, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) data revealed all tax collection targets from this industry were missed during last seven years. The total loss, estimated by a number of research studies including one by the SDPI (think tank), during the last seven years has been estimated at Rs 567 billion.

The study also highlighted how high and middle-income countries successfully imposed high taxes on cigarette products to decrease consumption and increase government revenues, but the fact remains that Pakistan still lacks a clear strategy on using cigarette taxation and prices as a public health tool.

Pakistan has signed Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC), the multilateral treaty initiated by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2004 to curb smoking. Two decades post FCTC, the cigarette industry is influencing decision making and the country stands at the losing end – loss of revenue and extra burden on the country's fragile healthcare system, they added.

https://www.brecorder.com/news/40293495?fbclid=IwZXh0bgVlbnR0cmEAAAR2EJFF7TeUEDSv9DD0eDwZbYVh5U6T1HIM40LB-ehd84Hj3cmaFFCCuo_aem_AaD1BRQ8ycVyyJBHVhCGIRKYu67ICcC0cF6U7seWed4Gw6bYpwb0Uf0ILFPERjCPIWgn_Z6F2e7HK4uhHj46

Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Foundation for A Smoke-Free World (FSFW), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

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