

Effects of international menthol bans on tobacco use and cessation

Regulating menthol in tobacco products is recommended in the implementation guidelines developed by Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.¹ The WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation (TobReg) unequivocally recommends banning the use of menthol at any level, as well as its analogues, precursors or derivatives in cigarettes. Also recommended is consideration of a ban of menthol in other tobacco products.²⁻⁴ TobReg also recommends banning synthetic coolants with a chemical structure or physiological and sensory effects similar to those of menthol.⁴

Given what is known about the physiological effects of menthol, several potential positive outcomes might be expected after jurisdictions ban the sale of cigarette products containing menthol. After the introduction of a ban on menthol, young people who do not have access to menthol cigarettes may be less likely to experiment with tobacco, and some of those young people already experimenting may be less likely to progress to regular smoking. Among people whose smoking patterns are more established, some former regular menthol smokers will quit and some will switch to non-menthol products. This switch may help the individual to reduce the amount they smoke, and may increase the individual's chances of successfully quitting at a later stage. These are the potential benefits, but what has happened in practice?

Bans on menthol use in tobacco products have now been enacted in numerous countries and local jurisdictions—see detailed **Table attached**. Studies have now been conducted in several North American and European jurisdictions where bans have been in place for some time.

Published studies to date have clearly demonstrated that bans have reduced the amount of menthol tobacco products sold or reported to be used.⁵⁻¹⁰ Findings include evidence of:

- **increased quitting activity and/or**
- **decreased overall sales and/or**
- **decreased total population use of cigarette and/or tobacco products.**

There is also evidence that **use of illicit tobacco has not significantly increased coinciding with these positive outcomes**, despite predictions by tobacco companies of large increases.

Canada

Seven out of ten Canadian provinces had implemented bans on sales of menthol tobacco products by July 2017.¹¹ By 2018 (i.e. one year after these bans were all implemented), people living in these provinces who smoked menthol cigarettes prior to the bans in 2016 were more likely to successfully quit than people who smoke non-menthol cigarettes.¹² People who smoked menthol in 2016 were 1.6-fold more likely to make quit attempts and daily menthol smokers were 2.2-fold more likely to successfully quit after the bans, as measured by 2018.¹³ There was also no detected surge in purchasing from First Nation reserves or seizures of illicit cigarettes (either menthol or non-menthol) after the bans were implemented.^{6, 14}

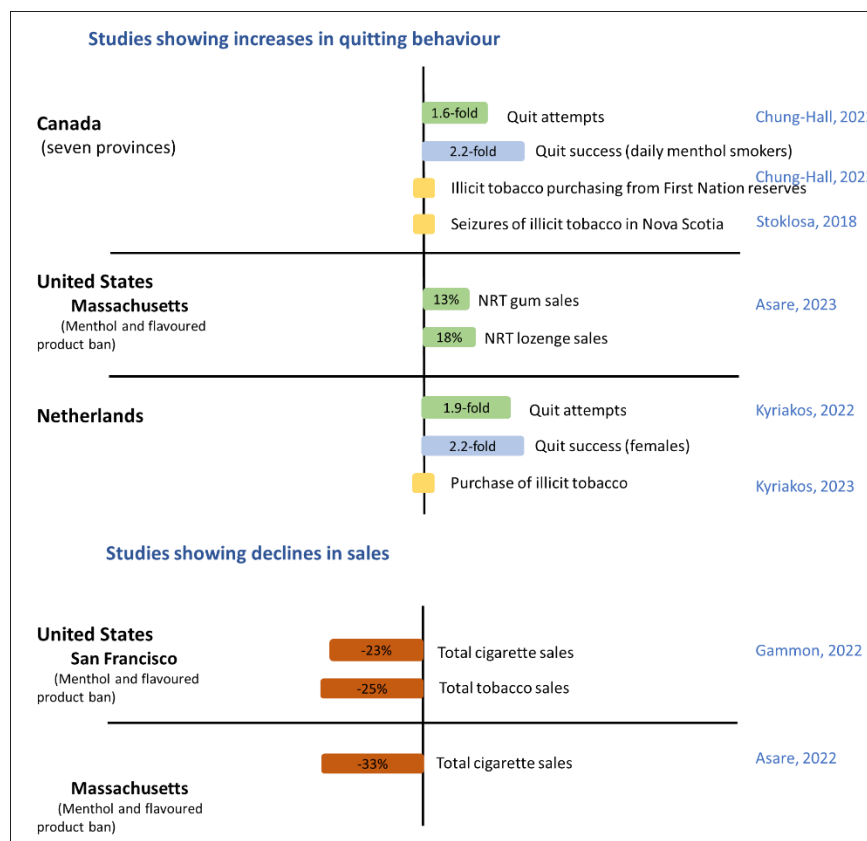
United States

Within the United States, numerous states and cities have implemented bans on the sale of menthol flavoured cigarettes, many as part of wider bans on flavoured cigarettes. The effects of bans on sales

of menthol and other flavoured cigarettes in the city of San Francisco and state of Massachusetts have been evaluated. Both jurisdictions saw significant reductions in the sales of menthol tobacco products after implementation of bans.^{7, 8}

In San Francisco, the ban was followed by a 23% reduction in total sales of cigarettes (menthol and non-mentholated) and a 25% reduction in the sales of all tobacco products over the period between July 2015 and December 2019. There was no evidence of substitution with other products that had flavour-like concepts in their names.⁷

The ban on sales of menthol tobacco products in Massachusetts was followed by a 33% reduction in total sales of cigarettes.⁸ There was a corresponding increase in sales of nicotine replacement lozenges and gum.¹⁵



The Netherlands

The sale of flavoured cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco, including those with menthol flavour, was banned in May 2020 throughout the European Union.¹⁶

A study of people who smoked menthol cigarettes prior to the ban in the Netherlands examined their quitting activity post-ban. There was an almost doubling in attempts to quit and over double the rate of successful cessation for women.¹⁰ There was no detected increase in illicit purchasing or tobacco smuggling from outside the European Union in the year after the menthol ban.¹⁷

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