

PHMDC: Wisconsin groups applaud national partner statement celebrating FDA's announcement to prohibit menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars

Posted on Wednesday, May 11, 2022

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin – Today, local and state health groups weighed in on the Food and Drug Administration's proposed rules to prohibit menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars. Several dozen national organizations signed onto an advertisement featured in the Washington Post, New York Times and Politico supporting the FDA action.

The ad reads: "PROTECT KIDS, ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY. SAVE LIVES. The FDA has our full support to prohibit menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars. For decades, Big Tobacco has targeted Black Americans, kids and other communities with menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, profiting at the expense of lives and health. By advancing rules to prohibit these flavored tobacco products, the FDA is taking historic action to save lives and protect future generations from addiction. This life saving policy must be finalized and implemented without delay." View all the organizations that signed onto it here: https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/content/press_office/2021/stopmenthol.pdf.

State groups coming forward to celebrate the FDA action include the Wisconsin Asthma Coalition, Wisconsin Public Health Association, Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards, Marshfield Clinic, Diverse and Resilient, Gunderson Health System, and several local and regional tobacco prevention

coalitions. This reflects the reality that tobacco use remains the number one cause of death in Wisconsin, and the tobacco industry uses flavors to target youth and vulnerable communities.

“It’s too easy for kids to get their hands on flavored products,” Dr. Todd Mahr agreed. Dr. Mahr is a Pediatric Asthma Specialist at Gundersen Health System in La Crosse. “Little cigars are often kept in front of the counter near chips and candy, and they’re sold for less than a dollar throughout Wisconsin,” Dr. Mahr added.

“Retailers sell underage buyers little cigars or cigarillos more often than e-cigarettes or cigarettes,” said Dr. Geoffrey Swain, President of the Wisconsin Public Health Association. “Moreover,” Swain added, “over half of current Wisconsin high schoolers who smoke report that they usually smoke menthol cigarettes.”

The FDA and its Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee have repeatedly concluded that eliminating menthol cigarettes would benefit public health, especially among Black Americans.

“A study in the Milwaukee area showed that tobacco retailers in Black neighborhoods had almost twice as much outdoor menthol advertising,” said Gerry Coon, President and CEO of Diverse and Resilient. Diverse and Resilient worked as part of a coalition that encouraged PrideFest to reject tobacco advertisement after recognizing targeting of the LGBTQ+ community, specifically with menthol cigarettes.

“Exposure to retail marketing is linked to kids starting to use tobacco, and it makes it harder for smokers to quit as it triggers impulse purchases,” Dr. Swain explained.

“Menthol cigarettes continue to wreak havoc on the health of the Black community,” said Lorraine Lathen, Wisconsin African American Tobacco Prevention Network Director. “For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted Black communities with marketing for menthol cigarettes. Largely because of menthol cigarettes, Black smokers have a harder time quitting smoking and die at high rates from tobacco-related diseases like cancer, heart disease and stroke,” Lathen added.

The Wisconsin African American Tobacco Prevention Network provides leadership

for No Menthol Sunday, a national observance day this Sunday, that engages faith leaders and their communities in a discussion about the tobacco industry targeting the Black community with menthol cigarette marketing. Find out more about No Menthol Sunday - <https://www.jumpatthesunllc.com/nms.html>.