

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



NYS AAP, DISTRICT II

August 8, 2013

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Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061
Rockville, MD 20852

Docket No. FDA-2013-N-0521

Dear Sir or Madam,

As members of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics, District II, representing pediatricians from Long Island to Buffalo, we are writing to **SUPPORT A COMPLETE BAN ON MENTHOL FROM EVERY TYPE OF TOBACCO PRODUCT.**

This letter comes in response to your request for public comments on the scientific findings of the report "Menthol Cigarettes and Public Health, Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations," by the Tobacco Products Safety Advisory Committee. The comprehensive, 252-page report, commissioned by Congress, determined that "menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk above that seen with non-menthol cigarettes."

We are writing as pediatric healthcare providers who care for the 1.1 million children who smoke menthol cigarettes and on behalf of the 20% of all American children who have begun to smoke, are at high risk of smoking initiation, or live exposed to the dangers of second-and-third hand smoke. Out of concern for the welfare of our patients, we see this ban as an issue of child protection. Data from the National Youth Tobacco Survey shows that most adult smokers tried their **first cigarette between the ages of 11 and 13 years**. Most of these children became **regular, daily smokers from 14-17 years**, making tobacco exposure a child health issue.

Children who try cigarettes but never progress to regular habitual smoking are often disgusted by the throat irritation caused by their initial cigarette. The report makes clear that "the addition of menthol to cigarettes high in tar and nicotine can reduce the irritating effect of nicotine," making smoking more palatable and attractive to children. Additionally, **menthol increases the addictive power of cigarette smoking**, particularly in adolescents, making it harder for them to quit.

Menthol cigarette smoking is not just a public health issue, but a social welfare concern. At a time when almost 20% of American children live in poverty, and significant health disparities exist among ethnic and socio-economic groups, menthol cigarette advertising is predatory. Data from the National Cancer Institute demonstrates **promotions of menthol cigarettes target youth, young adults and African Americans**. Much of this promotion appears to influence families from lower socio-economic groups, as menthol cigarette use is, per the report, prevalent among the "unemployed (and) people with an annual family income of less than \$10,000."

It has been almost half a century since the United States Surgeon General first reported on the health risks of smoking. For almost that long, pediatricians have advocated for their patients, calling for the elimination of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol. These additives play a major role in addicting our children to nicotine and condemning them to a lifetime burden of illness. Despite the best efforts of individual pediatricians counseling our patients to never attempt smoking, quit smoking or our assistance helping parents quit smoking, we have not been able to protect our vulnerable patients from this public health threat.

As pediatricians, we take seriously the burden of protecting children in one of the nation's most populous areas and ask you to support our call for a **BAN ON MENTHOL-FLAVORED TOBACCO PRODUCTS** as part of our mutual **partnership with the Food and Drug Administration in caring for the nation's children.**

We are available for further comment at your request. Please contact Shetal Shah, MD, FAAP at shetaldoc@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Laraque', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Danielle Laraque, MD, FAAP
Chair, NYS AAP, District II