



Menthol cigarette use in Greater Cincinnati, 2018–2022

Tobacco use remains the single most preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the U.S.¹ While smoking rates have been declining, menthol use is increasing.² **Menthol flavoring makes it easier for people to start using tobacco products, makes nicotine more addictive and makes tobacco products harder to quit.**³

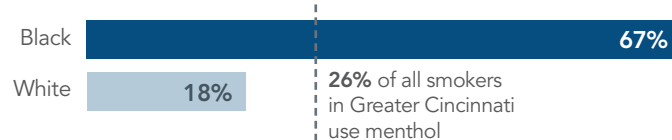
Who is smoking menthol cigarettes?

Menthol cigarettes lead to tobacco-related health disparities in the U.S.² Certain population groups experience higher rates of menthol use—people who are or identify as young, racial and ethnic minority, LGBTQ+, or women, as well as those with lower incomes or mental health conditions.^{2,3} **One factor driving these trends is the tobacco industry’s well-documented, aggressive menthol marketing strategies**—often directly targeted at these same groups.^{4,5,6} In Greater Cincinnati, **26% of current smokers use menthol cigarettes.** Here are the trends we see among specific population groups.

BLACK ADULTS

Smokers who are Black were nearly four times more likely to smoke menthol cigarettes than smokers who are white. This is relatively unchanged since 2018.

PERCENT OF CURRENT SMOKERS USING MENTHOL – BY RACE

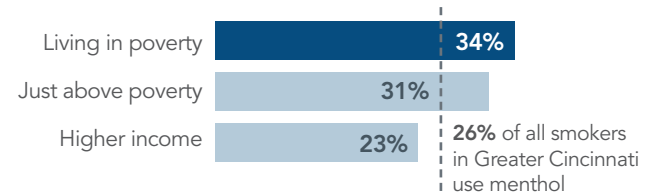


SOURCE: 2022 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

ADULTS WITH LOWER INCOMES

Smokers living in poverty were about 50% more likely to smoke menthol cigarettes than smokers with higher incomes.⁷ This is relatively unchanged since 2018.

PERCENT OF CURRENT SMOKERS USING MENTHOL – BY INCOME



SOURCE: 2022 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

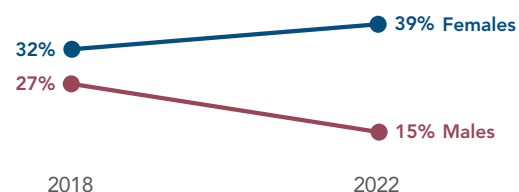
Smokers who are Black or with lower incomes have higher rates of menthol use and are also more affected by tobacco-related harms. People with lower incomes are more likely to suffer from smoking-related diseases than people with higher incomes; people who are Black are more likely to die from these smoking-related diseases than people who are white.^{8,9}

FEMALE ADULTS

From 2018 to 2022, **menthol use increased among smokers who are female** and decreased among smokers who are male.

Smokers who are female are now more than twice as likely as smokers who are male to use menthol cigarettes.

PERCENT OF CURRENT SMOKERS USING MENTHOL – BY GENDER

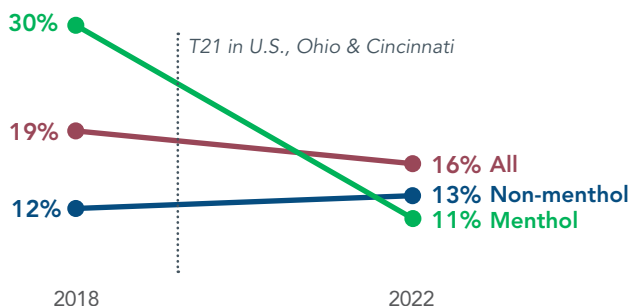


SOURCE: 2018 & 2022 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Surveys

How does age factor in?

In 2022, nearly three times fewer current menthol smokers reported they began smoking between the ages of 18 and 20 than in 2018.

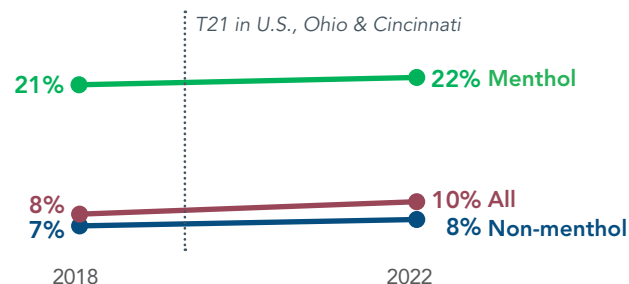
PERCENT OF CURRENT ADULT SMOKERS WHO FIRST USED BETWEEN 18 AND 20 YEARS OLD



SOURCE: 2018 & 2022 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Surveys

In both 2018 and 2022, nearly three times more current menthol smokers reported they started smoking at age 21 or older than non-menthol smokers.

PERCENT OF CURRENT ADULT SMOKERS WHO FIRST USED AT AGE 21 OR OLDER



SOURCE: 2018 & 2022 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Surveys

Tobacco 21 (T21) went into effect in 2019. Current menthol smokers who began smoking while 18-20 years old declined from 2018 to 2022. Nearly 3 times more menthol smokers than non-menthol smokers began smoking at age 21 or older. This demonstrates the need for menthol restrictions that cover all ages.

What's on the minds of menthol smokers?

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009 created a national ban on flavored cigarettes but excluded menthol.¹⁰ In 2021, the FDA announced it would remove the exemption for menthol; however, the rule has not been finalized.^{11,12} Without a comprehensive national flavor ban, local policy can be an effective approach. Two states and over 180 local jurisdictions across the U.S. restrict the sale of menthol cigarettes.¹³

When asked what they would do if a law prohibited the sale of menthol cigarettes, current menthol smokers in Greater Cincinnati said they would:

44% try to quit smoking

29% travel to another area to buy menthols

28% switch to another product, buy menthols online, do something else, or are not sure what they would do

SOURCE: 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

- Most menthol users (60%) believe menthol cigarettes are very addictive
- More than one in five menthol users (22%) believe menthol cigarettes are more harmful than non-menthol
- Most menthol users (68%) are thinking about quitting

SOURCE: 2018 Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey

Notes

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General. (2020) [Smoking Cessation: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2020](#).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023) [Menthol Smoking and Related Health Disparities](#).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023) [Menthol Tobacco Products](#).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022) [Unfair and Unjust Practices and Conditions Harm African American People and Drive Health Disparities](#).
- Stanford University. (2020) [Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising, Cigarette Advertising Themes, African Americans](#).
- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2023) [Impact of Menthol Cigarettes on Youth Smoking Initiation and Health Disparities](#).
- In 2022, a family of four living in poverty (the equivalent of 100% or less of the Federal Poverty Guidelines) had a household income of \$27,750 or less. A family of four living just above the poverty level (between 100% and 200% FPG) had a household income between \$27,751 and \$55,500. A family of four that had higher income (more than 200% FPG) had a household income greater than \$55,500.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022) [African American Communities Experience a Health Burden from Commercial Tobacco](#).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022) [People with Low Socioeconomic Status Experience a Health Burden from Commercial Tobacco](#).
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2020) [Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act – An Overview](#).
- Public Health Law Center at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. [Commercial Tobacco Control. Countering the Tobacco Epidemic, Menthol and Other Flavored Products](#).
- Department of Health and Human Services and Food and Drug Administration. (2022) [Tobacco Product Standard for Menthol in Cigarettes](#).
- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2023) [States & Localities That Have Restricted the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products](#).

Data presented in this brief come from the Greater Cincinnati Adult Tobacco Survey, a project of Interact for Health. Launched in 2018 and repeated in 2022, the survey is the most comprehensive source of local data for understanding adult tobacco use behaviors, attitudes, and public opinion in our region. The 2022 survey was conducted Aug. 25, 2022-Oct. 23, 2022 by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati and analyzed by the Center for Public Health Systems Science at Washington University in St. Louis. A random sample of 2,271 adults from a 22-county region surrounding Cincinnati was interviewed by telephone. In 95 out of 100 cases, estimates will be accurate to $\pm 2.1\%$. Learn more about the [2022 survey](#).