



## Ban on Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars

**For Prelims:** Tobacco Consumption, WHO FCTC, Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003

**For Mains:** Scenario of tobacco consumption in India and its impacts

### Why in News?

Recently, the US Food and Drug Administration issued a proposal to ban **menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars**.

- India has **not banned the sale of menthol cigarettes**.
- In 2012, **Brazil** became the **first country in the world to ban menthol cigarettes**.
- In 2019, the [Centre banned electronic cigarettes](#) and in addition, different states have their own rules in place banning hookah consumption, including flavored hookahs, in public places.

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## WHY THE US PROPOSAL

**HEALTH:** Menthol reduces the irritation of smoking and increases appeal; it also enhances nicotine's addictive effects, making it more difficult to quit smoking.

**RACE:** Menthol cigarette use is disproportionately higher among Black Americans (85% of smokers within the community) than White Americans (30%).

## What is the Proposal?

### ▪ About:

- It aims to **prohibit menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes** and prohibit all characterizing flavors (other than tobacco) in cigars.
- The proposed rules **would help prevent children from becoming the next generation** of smokers and help adult smokers quit.
  - The **proposed rules represent an important step to advance health equity** by significantly reducing tobacco-related health disparities.
- The proposed **ban does not cover electronic cigarettes.**

### ▪ Penalty:

- The rules **will not be enforced against individual consumers** for possession or use of menthol cigarettes or flavored cigars.
- The rules will only **“address manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, importers and retailers who manufacture, distribute, or sell such products.**

## What are the Reasons behind the Ban?

### ▪ Health:

- Menthol, with its minty taste and aroma, **“reduces the irritation and harshness of smoking.**
  - This **increases appeal and makes menthol cigarettes easier to use,** particularly for youth and young adults.
  - Menthol also **interacts with nicotine in the brain to enhance nicotine’s addictive effects,** while making it more difficult for people to quit smoking.

### ▪ Race:

- Menthol cigarette use is disproportionately higher among Black Americans (85% of smokers within the community) than White Americans (30%).
- The **proposed ban will affect a large share of the smoker population,** especially young adults and racially disadvantaged groups.

## What is the Status of Tobacco Consumption in India?

- According to the [Global Youth Tobacco Survey](#), India has the **second largest number (268 million) of tobacco users** in the world and of these 13 lakhs die every year from tobacco-related diseases.
  - **Ten lakh deaths are due to smoking,** with over 2,00,000 due to second-hand smoke exposure, and over 35,000 are due to smokeless tobacco use.
- **About 27 crore people above the age of 15 years** and 8.5% of school-going children in the age group 13-15 years use tobacco in some form in India.
  - India bears an **annual economic burden of over Rs. 1,77,340 crores** on account of tobacco use.
- Tobacco use is known to be a **major risk factor for several [non-communicable diseases](#)** such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic lung diseases. Nearly 27% of all cancers in India are due to tobacco usage.

## What will be the Impact of such Ban on India?

- If **India were to ban menthol and other flavored cigarettes,** the **impact might be limited,** given that chewing tobacco and bidi are the most common forms of tobacco use.
  - As per the last available **Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2016-17)** — India has 26.7 crore tobacco users aged 15 and above, 18% of the population uses smokeless tobacco, 7% smoke, and 4% use both.
- Even among smokers, the impact of such a step would only be on young adults and women who are just starting to smoke.
- Banning products has logistical issues as well because banning will **increase smuggling of the products.**
  - Currently, availability of various flavors has increased over the years.

## What are the Related Initiatives of India?

- **India:**
  - **WHO FCTC:**
    - India adopted the tobacco control provisions under [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(WHO FCTC\)](#).
  - **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003:**
    - It replaced the **Cigarettes Act of 1975** (largely limited to statutory warnings- 'Cigarette Smoking is Injurious to Health' to be displayed on cigarette packs and advertisements. It did not include non-cigarettes).
    - The **2003 Act also included** cigars, bidis, cheroots, pipe tobacco, hookah, chewing tobacco, pan masala, and gutka.
  - **Promulgation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Ordinance, 2019:**
    - It prohibits Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement of e-Cigarettes.
  - **National Tobacco Quitline Services (NTQLS):**
    - Tobacco Quitline Services have the **potential to reach many tobacco users** with the sole objective to provide telephone-based information, advice, support, and referrals for tobacco cessation.
  - **mCessation Programme:**
    - It is an initiative using **mobile technology for tobacco cessation**.
      - India launched **mCessation using text messages in 2016** as part of the government's [Digital India initiative](#).

## Way Forward

- **Inequality Perspective:**
  - **Public policy and health promotion interventions** (a part of the sociopolitical context) need to have an inequality perspective to have desired impact and accordingly modify tobacco control policies.
    - Tobacco control measures that **differentially target the poor** include banning of advertisements, raising tobacco prices, workplace interventions, free supply of cessation aids, and telephone help lines.
- **Suitable Policy Reformation:**
  - To reduce the mortality and morbidity related to tobacco, there **should be suitable policy reformation** with interventions like inclusion of large public health programs in relation with the **National Tobacco Control (NCD) Programme** to solve this problem holistically.

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