

Flavored tobacco restrictions in Massachusetts take effect on Monday

Colin A. Young

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Part of a recent state law restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products, including mint and menthol cigarettes, to smoking bars for on-premise consumption takes effect on Monday. Massachusetts in November became the first state in the country to prohibit retail sales of all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes.

“Keeping flavored tobacco products off the shelves here in Massachusetts is a huge win. Not only does it protect kids from starting on the path to a lifetime of tobacco addiction, but it protects population groups that we know Big Tobacco continually and intentionally targets with aggressive advertising campaigns and other predatory tactics including African Americans, Latinos, and the LGBTQ community,” Marc Hymovitz, Massachusetts director of government relations for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, said. “For years the tobacco industry has made efforts to appeal to kids and communities of color through the promotion of flavored tobacco products, including mint and menthol. Taking this weapon out of Big Tobacco’s arsenal will help prevent future generations from a lifetime of addiction.”

Convenience store owners and at least one community leader have called for a one-year delay for the new restrictions, arguing that the ban will drive menthol smokers to other states for their cigarettes and that Massachusetts does not have a plan to deal with an illicit market for flavored tobacco. Gov. Charlie Baker this week rejected those calls.

“It was a public health issue at the time and it was particularly important to a number of folks in the public health community and to the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus and the leadership, and we supported it and we signed it and we want to see it go into effect,” he said.

The flavor ban law gained traction on Beacon Hill amid a national outbreak of vaping-related lung disease, including five deaths in Massachusetts.