

The NSDUH Report

November 19, 2009

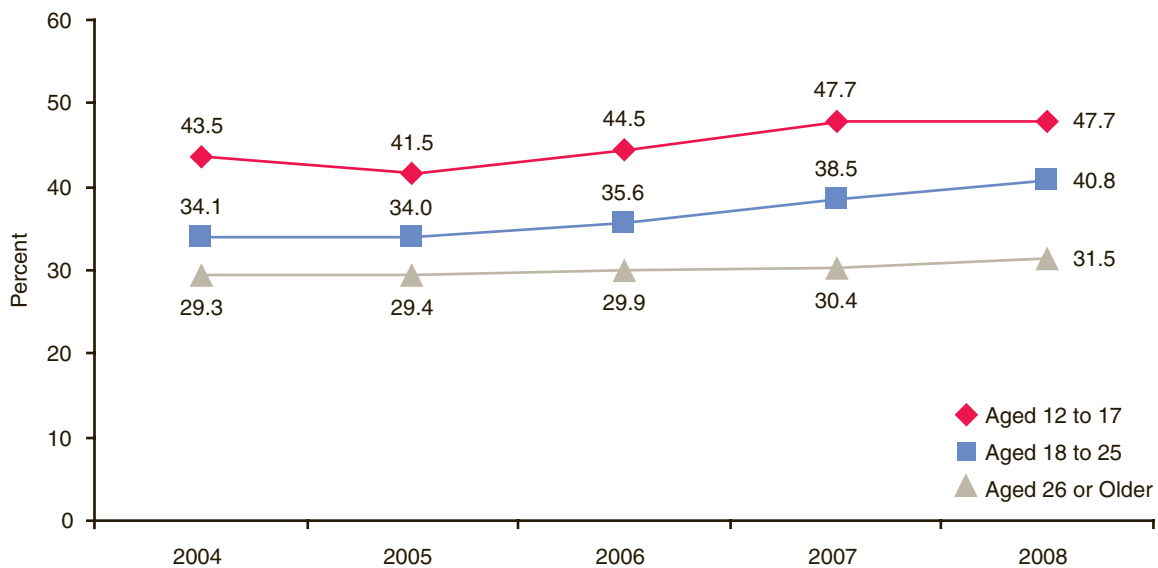
In Brief

- Among past month smokers, the rate of smoking menthol cigarettes increased from 31.0 percent in 2004 to 33.9 percent in 2008; increases were most pronounced for adolescents aged 12 to 17 (43.5 percent in 2004 vs. 47.7 percent in 2008), young adults aged 18 to 25 (34.1 vs. 40.8 percent), and males (26.9 vs. 30.8 percent)
- Past month smoking of menthol cigarettes was more likely among those who were recent smoking initiates (i.e., began smoking in the past year) than among those who were longer term smokers (i.e., initiated use more than a year ago) (44.6 vs. 31.8 percent, respectively); this pattern was consistent for persons aged 12 to 17 and those aged 18 to 25, for both genders, and for whites and Hispanics
- For blacks, past month use of menthol cigarettes was less likely among past month smokers who were recent smoking initiates than among their counterparts who were longer term smokers (73.9 vs. 82.8 percent)

Use of Menthol Cigarettes

Menthol is an additive to cigarettes that stimulates cold receptors, giving the sensation of coolness in the mouth, pharynx, and lungs. Menthol may mask the harshness of cigarette smoke and thereby make it easier for adolescents to start smoking.¹ Use of menthol cigarettes traditionally has been more common among blacks, other minorities, and younger users. It has been suggested that this differential use of menthol cigarettes may contribute to health disparities between white and black smokers. The effect of menthol on the initiation, progression, and cessation of tobacco use, however, is unclear, although recent research suggests that menthol cigarettes are more difficult to quit than other types of cigarettes.² The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (H.R. 1256)—which bans all cigarette flavorings except menthol—calls for research on the impact of the use of menthol in cigarettes on the public health.

Figure 1. Trends in Past Month Menthol Cigarette Use among Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 or Older, by Age Group: 2004 to 2008



Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks persons aged 12 or older about whether or not they smoked part or all of a cigarette in the past 30 days. Respondents who answered affirmatively are asked whether or not the cigarettes they smoked during the past 30 days were menthol and how many days they smoked during the past month.³ Additionally, persons who had ever smoked a cigarette are asked how old they were when they first began smoking cigarettes; responses are used to identify recent initiates (i.e., persons who used cigarettes for the first time in the 12 months prior to the survey).⁴

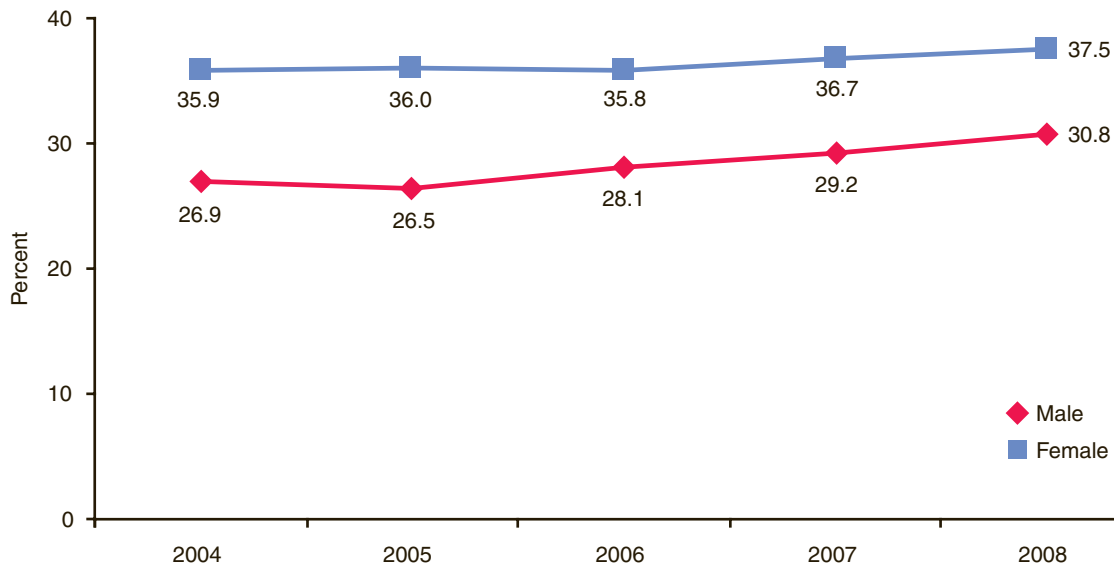
This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines the prevalence of use of

menthol cigarettes among past month smokers. The first section presents data on trends in use between 2004 and 2008. Findings in the remainder of the report are annual averages based on combined 2004 to 2008 NSDUH data.

Trends in Menthol Cigarette Use among Past Month Smokers

Overall, the rate of smoking menthol cigarettes among past month smokers increased from 31.0 percent in 2004 to 33.9 percent in 2008. Rates of menthol use increased from 43.5 to 47.7 percent among adolescents aged 12 to 17 and from 34.1 to 40.8 percent among young adults aged 18 to 25 (Figure 1). Rates also generally increased among males, from 26.9 to 30.8 percent (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trends in Past Month Menthol Cigarette Use among Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 or Older, by Gender: 2004 to 2008

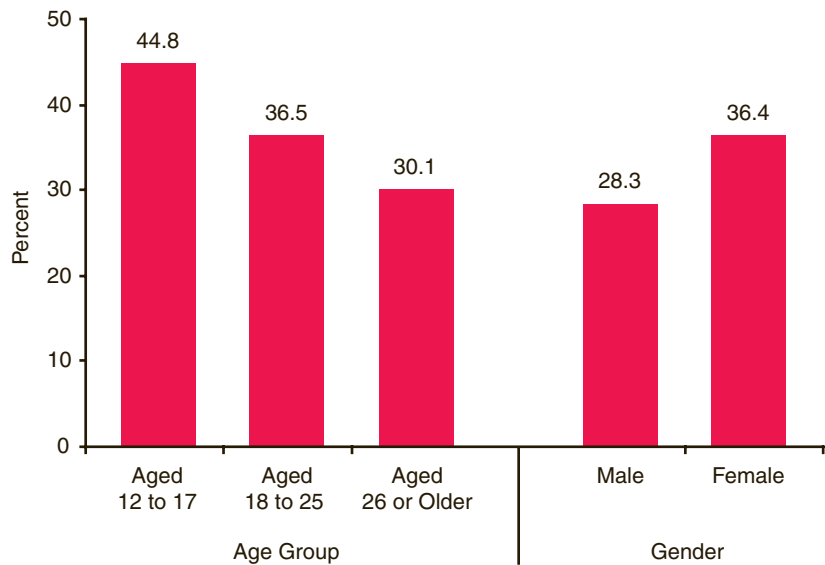


Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Use of Menthol Cigarettes among Past Month Smokers

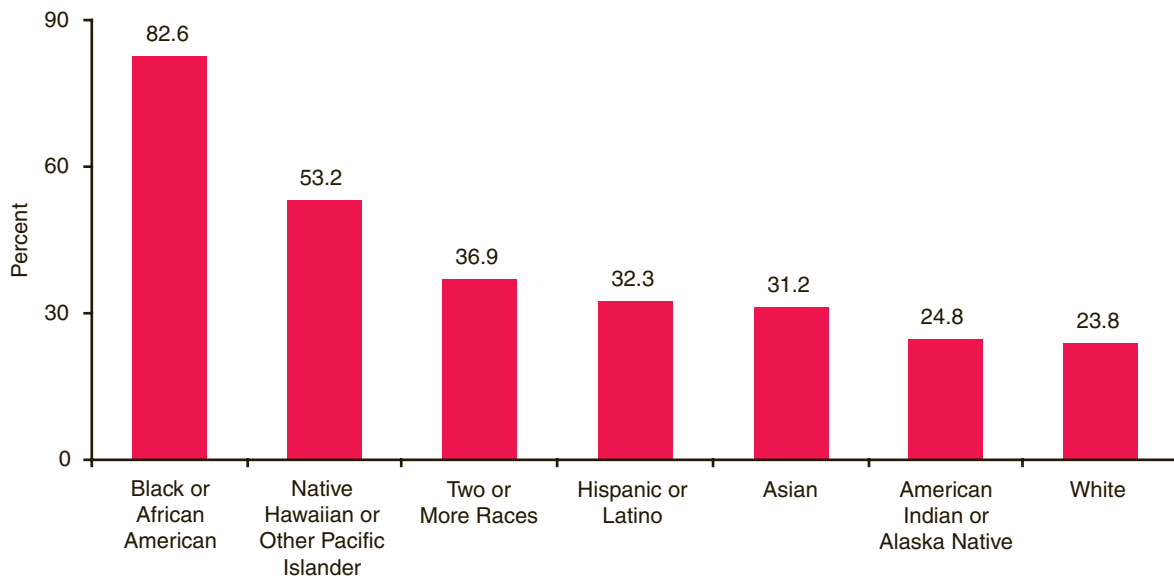
Combined 2004 to 2008 data indicate that nearly one third (32.0 percent) of past month smokers aged 12 or older smoked menthol cigarettes in the past month. The prevalence of menthol cigarette use among past month smokers decreased with age (44.8 percent among smokers aged 12 to 17, 36.5 percent among those aged 18 to 25, and 30.1 percent among those aged 26 or older) (Figure 3), and it was more

Figure 3. Past Month Menthol Cigarette Use among Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 or Older, by Age Group and Gender: 2004 to 2008



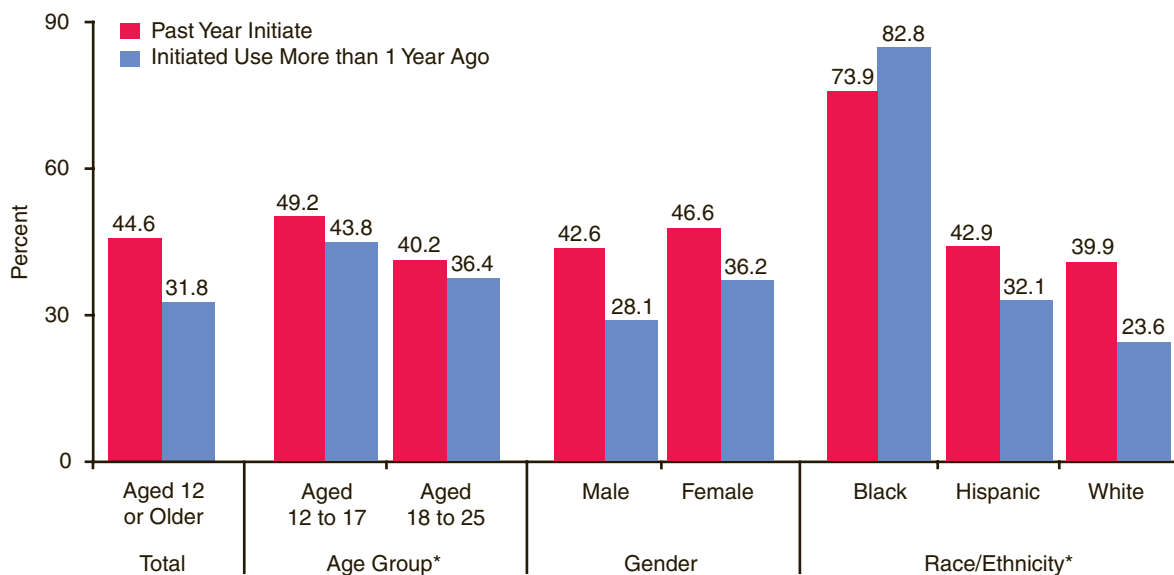
Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Figure 4. Past Month Menthol Cigarette Use among Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 or Older, by Race/Ethnicity: 2004 to 2008



Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Figure 5. Past Month Menthol Cigarette Use among Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 or Older, by Recency of Cigarette Initiation and Demographic Characteristics: 2004 to 2008



* Data for those aged 26 or older and for other racial/ethnic groups are not presented because of low precision.

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

likely among females than males (36.4 vs. 28.3 percent). Rates of menthol cigarette use varied greatly by race/ethnicity, ranging from 82.6 percent among blacks to 23.8 percent among whites (Figure 4).

Over three fifths of past month smokers (62.1 percent) smoked daily, and they were less likely than less frequent smokers to have used menthol cigarettes in the past month (30.1 vs. 35.1 percent).

Use of Menthol Cigarettes, by Recency of Cigarette Initiation

Most past month smokers (98.3 percent) initiated cigarette smoking more than 12 months before the survey (i.e., were longer term smokers). Past month use of menthol cigarettes was more likely among smokers who started in the past 12 months than among longer term smokers (44.6 vs. 31.8 percent) (Figure 5). This pattern was consistent for persons aged 12 to 17 and those aged 18 to 25, for both genders, and for whites and Hispanics.

For blacks, however, this pattern was reversed. Past month use of menthol cigarettes was less likely among recent smoking initiates than among longer term smokers (73.9 vs. 82.8 percent). Blacks who were recent initiates of cigarette smoking were about 1.9 times more likely than whites to have used menthol cigarettes in the past month; in comparison, blacks who were longer term smokers were 3.5 times more likely than whites to have done so.

Discussion

Since the 1964 publication of the first Surgeon General's Report on Smoking,⁵ the Nation's level of awareness on the adverse

health consequences of cigarettes has steadily increased. Federal, State, and local laws have increasingly restricted sales of tobacco products, raised taxes on these products, and curtailed the venues in which these products can be used. The data from NSDUH point out, however, that the initiation of tobacco products—particularly cigarettes—continues to be a public health problem. This appears to be especially true for menthol cigarettes and adolescents. Although research continues into the effects of menthol, prevention specialists may wish to consider prevention strategies for adolescents that are more targeted at the initiation of menthol cigarette use and the attractions of a “cooler” taste. Similarly, professionals involved in smoking cessation programs may want to consider whether or not menthol cigarette smokers need different or ancillary strategies and supports to become smoke-free.

End Notes

- ¹ National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2003, September). *The first conference on menthol cigarettes: Setting the research agenda, March 21-22, 2002, Atlanta, GA. Executive Summary* (NIH Publication No. 03-5439). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Available as a PDF at http://dcccps.nci.nih.gov/tcrb/MentholExecSumRprt4_10-16.pdf]
- ² Gandhi, K. K., Foulds, J., Steinberg, M. B., Lu, S. E., & Williams, J. M. (2009). Lower quit rates among African American and Latino menthol cigarette smokers at a tobacco treatment clinic. *International Journal of Clinical Practice*, 63, 360-367.
- ³ Current cigarette smokers were asked to report the total number of days in the past month that they smoked part or all of a cigarette (i.e., range of 1 to 30 days). If respondents did not know or refused to answer the question, they were asked for their best estimate of the number of days they smoked.
- ⁴ Respondents whose age at first cigarette use was equal to or 1 year less than their current age were asked to indicate the month in which they initiated their use of cigarettes.
- ⁵ U.S. Public Health Service, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. (1964). *Smoking and health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service* (DHHS Publication No. PHS 64-1103). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service.

Suggested Citation

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Findings from the SAMHSA 2004 to 2008 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

Use of Menthol Cigarettes

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The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The combined 2004 to 2008 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 340,476 persons aged 12 or older. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NSDUH Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information on the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2009). *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 09-4434, NSDUH Series H-36). Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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