

Evaluation of Ontario Menthol Cigarette Ban  
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Abstract:

In May 2015, Ontario passed legislation banning menthol cigarettes effective Jan 2017. This legislation presents an opportunity to understand the impacts of a menthol ban on individual and industry behavior. With this supplement application, we propose to use the type of mixed methods described in the Center for the Study of Tobacco Products (CSTP) Project 4 to evaluate the effects on smoker and industry behavior of Ontario's ban on the sale of menthol flavors. The CSTP's evaluative model uses analytic lab, human lab, RCT, and quantitative/qualitative methods to evaluate novel and/or modified risk tobacco products, and the application emphasized that one strength of our approach was that it is "plug and play": any new product could be evaluated using these techniques. As we have become more experienced with the model, we have recognized that many of the same methods, including quantitative/qualitative techniques, can be used to study other issues relevant to FDA's tobacco regulatory mission. One such issue involves the effect of limiting access to specific products or product classes. Thus, the specific aims of this project are to 1) Understand user behavior changes subsequent to a menthol ban by quantifying changes in tobacco use within recent menthol smokers using large-scale longitudinal survey methods with which our Ontario partners are expert and exploring qualitatively the impact of the ban on smokers using well-established concept mapping methods already in use at the CSTP and 2) Characterize industry behavior changes subsequent to a menthol ban by purchasing menthol and menthol replacement packs and conducting semiotic analysis of packs and associated advertising. This semiotic analysis will involve studying pack and advertising signs and symbols as well as how their meaning is constructed and understood. This project will be the first rigorous evaluation of a real-world ban on menthol flavored tobacco in a large market. Results will reveal how menthol smokers respond to the ban and how the tobacco industry adapts to it, both critical issues for future regulation and associated public education messaging. This information is precisely the knowledge needed to guide the development and implementation of future FDA regulation of menthol flavoring.