

Illicit purchasing and use of flavour accessories after the European Union menthol cigarette ban: Findings from the 2020-2021 ITC Netherlands Surveys

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Abstract

Background: The 2020 European Union (EU) menthol cigarette ban increased quitting among pre-ban menthol smokers in the Netherlands, but some reported continuing to smoke menthol cigarettes. This study examined three possible explanations for post-ban menthol use—(i) illicit purchasing, (ii) use of flavour accessories and (iii) use of non-menthol replacement brands marketed for menthol smokers.

Methods: Data were from the ITC Netherlands Cohort Surveys among adult smokers before the menthol ban (Wave 1: February–March 2020, N = 2067) and after the ban (Wave 2: September–November 2020, N = 1752; Wave 3: June–July 2021, N = 1721). Bivariate, logistic regression and generalized estimating equation model analyses were conducted on weighted data.

Results: Illicit purchasing remained low from pre-ban (2.4%, 95% CI: 1.8–3.2, Wave 1) to post-ban (1.7%, 1.2–2.5%, Wave 3), with no difference between menthol and non-menthol smokers from Wave 1 to Wave 3. About 4.4% of post-ban menthol smokers last purchased their usual brand outside of the EU and 3.6% from the internet; 42.5% of post-ban menthol smokers and 4.4% of smokers overall reported using flavour accessories, with greater odds among those aged 25–39 years vs. 55+ (aOR = 3.16, P = 0.002). Approximately 70% of post-ban smokers who reported using a menthol brand were actually using a non-menthol replacement brand.

Conclusions: There was no increase in illicit purchasing or of smuggling outside the EU among menthol and non-menthol smokers in the Netherlands 1 year after the EU menthol cigarette ban. Use of flavour accessories and non-menthol replacement brands best explain post-ban menthol use, suggesting the need to ban accessories and ensure industry compliance.

Recommended Citation

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