metro OBGYN

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Saint Paul City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. West, 310 City Hall
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Members of the Saint Paul City Council:

We are a physician group providing women's health care across the Twin Cities East Metro area since 1960. Many of our patients live in Saint Paul, and our main clinic is next to St. Joseph's Hospital. We are writing today to ask that you restrict the sale of menthol tobacco in our community.

The health risks of tobacco use disproportionately affect women's health.[1] It is well known that smoking by a pregnant woman is harmful to her fetus.[2] Tobacco companies single out women, particularly adolescents, and those from low income communities and communities of color, and encourage them to smoke.[3]

Much of targeted tobacco marketing is from years of the tobacco industry strategically targeting communities with menthol cigarettes. A survey conducted in Ramsey County found that menthol tobacco advertising was more common in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of communities of color, low income, and youth residents.[4] According to the Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey in 2014, 44% of Minnesota high school smokers use menthol tobacco. Menthol is uniquely attractive to youth, as the taste masks the harsh flavor of tobacco. As a result, menthol tobacco is easier to start. Sadly, it also makes it harder to quit. Many of our patients fit in these targeted demographics in multiple ways. This targeted marketing creates health disparities for minorities who fall victim to preventable diseases from tobacco use at much higher rates than the general population.

Tobacco use and women's health. Committee Opinion No. 503. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Obstet Gynecol 2011; 118:746-50.
Castles et. al., Effects of smoking during pregnancy. Five met-analyses. Am J Prev Med 1999; 16:208-15.
[3] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NB99237/.
[4] Widome et. al., 2013.

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Saint Paul has already prohibited the sale of candy and fruit flavored tobacco products in stores where kids can enter. Now is the time to treat menthol tobacco products the same way that we treat other flavors. The Saint Paul City Council can help stop future health disparities by putting menthol tobacco products in adult-only stores.

Sincerely,