



Public Health Division

County of Santa Cruz

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Press Release

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County Issues Health Advisory for Vaping-Associated Lung Injury

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY – A Health Advisory has been issued for lung injuries related to vaping cannabis, cannabis oils or nicotine products in Santa Cruz County after the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued a statewide Health Alert. There are currently no cases of vaping-associated lung illness reported in the County, however Health Officer, Dr. Gail Newel, has requested local clinicians to watch for symptoms, inquire about use of vaping products, and report any suspected cases.

Since June, 36 cases of vaping-associated lung illness requiring hospitalization were reported in California. In Kings County, located in California's Central Valley region, seven patients experienced trouble breathing that worsened after an initial diagnosis of pneumonia or bronchitis. Those patients reported vaping cannabis or cannabis-based oils in the weeks prior to hospital admission and failed to respond to antibiotic treatment. Medical tests for infectious disease were negative.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) are investigating 215 potential cases of severe lung illness associated with e-cigarette product use reported by 25 states, including California, over the past three months. One death has been confirmed.

Most patients nationwide report vaping the cannabis compounds THC and/or cannabidiol (CBD), and some also report vaping nicotine products. The exact cause of the illnesses is currently unknown.

The Health Advisory requests clinicians to report similar cases to the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency Communicable Disease Unit and collect associated vaping products for testing.

“Although the Health Advisory is for clinicians, we want all residents and visitors in Santa Cruz County to be aware of these serious lung injuries,” said Dr. Newel. “As we learn more about the cause of these injuries, I urge individuals to limit their use of vaping products or quit using them altogether.”

Vaping refers to the practice of inhaling a chemical aerosol from an e-cigarette device, which works by heating a liquid that can contain nicotine, marijuana, or other drugs. While vaping has been touted as a potential harm reduction method, the long-term health impacts are unknown. The liquids used in e-cigarettes can contain toxic chemicals that can cause lung damage.

Those who are concerned about these specific health risks, should consider refraining from using e-cigarette products. Also, anyone who uses e-cigarette products should not buy these products off the street (e.g., e-cigarette products with THC, other cannabinoids) and should not modify e-cigarette products or add any substances to these products that are not intended by the manufacturer. E-cigarette products should not be used

by youth, young adults, pregnant women, as well as adults who do not currently use tobacco products. People who use e-cigarette products should monitor themselves for symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, chest pain) and promptly seek medical attention if you have concerns about your health.

Cases of lung injury related to vaping come in the context of rapid increases in vaping rates across Santa Cruz County. According to the most recent California Healthy Kids Survey, 31% of 11th graders in Santa Cruz County reported having used electronic cigarettes with 16% identifying as current users.

On January 1, 2020, a ban on the sale of flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, will go into effect in the City and County of Santa Cruz and the City of Capitola. The City of Watsonville is considering a similar ban.

For help quitting vaping or smoking call California's Helpline at [1-800-No-Butts](tel:1-800-NO-BUTTS) or visit the following websites www.smokefree.gov and www.becomeanex.org. You can also get help by texting "QUIT" to [\(202\) 804-9884](tel:(202)804-9884) or text "DITCHJUUL" to 88709.

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