
New Mexico Department of Health Public Health Advisory – October 2, 2019

Vaping Related Lung Injury: A Summary of the Public Health Risks and Recommendations for the Public

The New Mexico Department of Health (“NMDOH”) seeks to inform the public about the imminent public health risks posed by the use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), or vaping, which has recently been linked to severe breathing problems, lung damage, and even death. *NMDOH urges everyone to refrain from vaping, no matter the substance or source, until current investigations are complete.*

Background

Vaping is inhaling aerosol from an e-cigarette or other vaping device that heats a liquid that can contain nicotine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), cannabidiol (CBD) or other substances. The shapes and sizes of these devices vary and include colorful vape pens, modified tank systems, and new pod-based devices that can look like USB flash drives, cell phones, credit card holders, and highlighters. These devices are frequently referred to as e-cigarettes, e-cigs, vapes, vape pens, electronic vaporizers, pod mods, or pod systems.

Since June 2019, NMDOH has received reports that 14 individuals in New Mexico have developed severe lung injury requiring hospitalization after vaping, with certain individuals requiring intensive care. Across the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported over 805 cases of lung damage associated with vaping across 46 states and 1 U.S. territory. Twelve deaths due to severe lung injury associated with vaping have been reported by CDC.

NMDOH, along with other states, the CDC, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), local health departments, and healthcare providers are working hard to determine what is in the vape products that is making people sick. The FDA and the CDC have initiated investigations, including testing of a wide range of vapor products, and investigations into supply chains of vapor products. The CDC and FDA have not yet determined the specific cause of this outbreak and have recently advised consumers to consider refraining from vaping pending the outcome of their investigations.

Although NMDOH regulates in-state manufacturers of medical cannabis vaping products to ensure they are as safe as possible for those who choose to vape, NMDOH warns that individuals put themselves at risk any time they inhale a foreign substance into their lungs. The risk of vaping now includes death. CDC continues to warn that any tobacco product use, including e-cigarettes, is unsafe, especially for youth, pregnant, and breastfeeding women.

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Sudden and acute lung injury from vaping is a new health problem.

We are learning from this investigation that lung injury can happen very suddenly to people who vape, including people who have not been vaping for a long time, and young, healthy people who do not have lung disease or other health problems. This is different from most other health issues caused by vaping and smoking, which happen over a long time and can be worse in people who have other medical conditions. Additionally, most patients do not have a recent history of smoking regular cigarettes, suggesting these lung issues are exclusively related to vaping. Many types of vape products may be causing the lung damage from vaping.

Almost all people with lung damage from vaping say that they vaped or “dabbed” the cannabis products THC and CBD in cartridges, waxes, oils, and other forms. Some people report vaping only nicotine. Many people report vaping a combination of both nicotine and cannabis products. The investigation is still in process, but the one thing that people with the lung illness have in common is a history of vaping.

The CDC, FDA and state health departments are contacting the people who had lung injury from vaping to find out which products they used, where they purchased the products, and to collect their vape products to test for harmful ingredients.

Signs of severe lung injury include breathing problems and other symptoms.

People with lung injury from vaping typically have symptoms that start a few days to a few weeks before they go see a doctor. All people hospitalized developed some type of breathing problems, but many people also have other symptoms. The symptoms reported by those who have gotten sick are:

- Breathing symptoms: trouble catching their breath, coughing, chest pain
- Gastrointestinal symptoms: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain
- Non-specific symptoms: feeling tired, fever, weight loss

There is no test that a doctor can do to know that breathing problems are from vaping right away. Laboratory blood tests and an x-ray or CT scan of the lungs may be necessary. People with vaping-related lung disease are usually admitted to the hospital because of their breathing problems.

Be aware that your child’s respiratory issues could be related to vaping.

Parents should be aware that numerous cases involve children under age 18. E-cigarettes and vaping devices are available in more than 15,000 flavors that may be attractive to children. Preliminary results from the 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey reported more than one in four high-school students use vapor products with an overwhelming majority reporting use of fruit, menthol, or mint flavors. The appeal of flavored nicotine vapor products, as well as advertising and promotional activities targeted at youth, are contributing to the dramatic increase in youth vaping. Be aware of the symptoms in case your middle or high school child develops symptoms and seek medical attention.

No definitive cause for severe lung injury related to vaping.

There are many different possible ingredients added to cannabis and nicotine to make the cartridges, waxes, and oils used for vaping. Multiple people who were diagnosed with lung damage from vaping say that they received the cannabis products from unlicensed smoke shops or individuals. Vape products sold by unlicensed retailers are not tested and can contain harmful ingredients. State and federal investigators do not know if all of the people in the country with this illness use the same vape products, or if the products were contaminated with the same substance. The long-term effects of vaping are still unknown, but these short-term effects are alarming.

Recommendations for the public.

1. NMDOH urges everyone to quit vaping altogether, but particularly THC products. For those who continue, you are urged to avoid buying any vaping products on the street and never modify a store-bought vape product.
2. If you, or your child, have vaped at all in the past few months and are having new problems with breathing or other symptoms, you should seek medical care immediately and tell your healthcare provider about your history of vaping.
3. If you decide to stop vaping, do not replace vaping with smoking combustible cigarettes. Ask your doctor for FDA-approved quitting treatments.

Resources:

For additional information, please contact NMDOH or review the [CDC’s recommendations](#) about the vaping-related lung injuries.