

E-cigarettes and Severe Lung Injury

The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) is investigating cases of severe lung injury related to e-cigarette use or vaping. DPH is working closely with healthcare providers, local health departments, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), and other states to gather information about this outbreak.

What are the symptoms?

Patients are experiencing respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath, and fatigue. In most cases, these symptoms worsen over a period of days or weeks before admission to the hospital. Some patients have also reported fever, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, chest pain, and loss of appetite.

What is the cause of the illness?

The cause or causes of this injury have not yet been determined, but all reported cases have a history of using e-cigarettes. Many identified cases have used e-cigarette products containing THC. No one device or substance, including vitamin E acetate, has been identified in all of the samples tested. DPH and CDC are collecting information on the e-cigarette devices and chemicals used in the 90 days prior to illness. The evidence does not suggest that an infectious disease is the cause of the outbreak.

Who is affected?

As of October 15, 2019, there are at least 1,479 confirmed and probable cases across 49 states plus the U.S. Virgin Islands. There have been 33 confirmed deaths. Most of the cases have occurred in youth and young adults. This may be because young people are more likely to use e-cigarettes than older adults. Numbers of probable and confirmed cases may change as medical testing is completed; cases may be determined to not be directly related to vaping.

What should you do?

If you are concerned about these specific health risks, consider not using e-cigarettes. If you do use e-cigarettes and you experience symptoms like those reported in this outbreak, seek medical care promptly. Please take your e-cigarette products (device, cartridges, etc.) with you to the doctor.

Learn more about e-cigarettes at www.CDC.gov/e-cigarettes. For help quitting smoking or using e-cigarettes, visit www.QuitNowKentucky.com, or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for free help.

E-cigarettes are devices that deliver an aerosol to the user by heating a liquid that usually contains nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals. E-cigarettes can also be used to deliver marijuana or other substances.

Using an e-cigarette is often called "vaping."

Some adults have used e-cigarettes to attempt to quit smoking. However, e-cigarettes are not currently approved by the FDA as an aid to quit smoking. Furthermore, youth are more likely than adults to use e-cigarettes. An estimated 20.8% of high school students have used an e-cigarette in the past 30 days.¹

¹ Gentzke AS, Creamer M, Cullen KA, et al. *Vital Signs: Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2011–2018*. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2019;68:157–164.

Kentucky

Cases Reported for Investigation: 28
Ruled Out Cases: 4*
Probable Cases: 6
Confirmed Cases: 2

Ruled out cases were reported but during investigation were determined not to include a documented history of vaping, or otherwise do not meet the case definition.