



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
P. O. BOX 3378  
HONOLULU, HI 96801-3378

In reply, please refer to:  
File:

September 10, 2019

**MEDICAL ADVISORY: PROBABLE VAPING-ASSOCIATED SEVERE  
RESPIRATORY ILLNESS CASE**

Dear Healthcare Provider:

We are investigating a case of likely vaping-associated severe respiratory illness in a Hawaii resident. The case presented with tactile fevers, cough, nonspecific gastrointestinal symptoms, and hemoptysis, and required brief intubation. Multiple states have identified similar patients, mostly late teens and young adults although older adults have been affected as well. Patients have been hospitalized with acute severe pulmonary disease associated with vaping (i.e., use of e-cigarette devices to aerosolize substances for inhalation), specifically tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) containing products. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has received reports of over 450 cases, including 6 deaths, from at least 33 states and one U.S. territory.<sup>1</sup> Clinicians should ask your patients if they have used an e-cigarette device within the previous 90 days and whether they have symptoms of respiratory illness. *Critical care specialists, pulmonologists, and hospitalists, especially, should be alert for signs of severe respiratory illness among patients who recently used vaping products, including e-cigarettes and THC products.*

**National Outbreak Background**

Patients have presented with respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath, and chest pain. Some have also reported gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea) and/or nonspecific symptoms (fever, anorexia/weight loss, fatigue). Although some have worsened over several days, others have progressed over weeks with patients frequenting primary/urgent care or emergency departments before hospital admission. Radiologic findings have varied (e.g., bilateral opacities, diffuse ground-glass opacities with sub-pleural sparing). Some cases have demonstrated findings consistent with lipid pneumonia. An *infectious etiology is unlikely and has been excluded* in most patients. Some patients have had clinical improvement with systemic corticosteroid therapy. No single product has been implicated; however, *many patients report using e-cigarette products with liquids containing but not limited to cannabinoid products (e.g., THC).* For more information, refer to CDC's recent health alert.<sup>2</sup>

**Action Items for Hawaii Clinicians:**

- **Inpatient setting:**
  - Assess patients for a vaping history for THC, nicotine, and/or *any* other products in the

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic\\_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00421.aspx>

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- 90 days before illness onset.
- Consider this syndrome in patients with severe respiratory disease and vaping history, especially those with no explicative etiology.
- Consider consulting a pulmonologist to guide additional diagnostics and management.
- **Outpatient setting:**
  - Assess patients for recent or prior use of vaping products.
  - Consider potential for worsening disease progression if risk factors present.
- **All:**
  - Educate all patients on the risks associated with vaping nicotine and other products. Advise patients to seek care if symptoms worsen or return after initial resolution.
  - While the national investigation is ongoing, persons should consider not using e-cigarette products, especially those purchased from sources other than authorized retailers (e.g., e-cigarette products with THC) and those modified in a manner not intended by the manufacturer.
  - Contact the Disease Outbreak Control Division immediately (refer to contact information below) if you suspect you are managing a case of vaping associated severe respiratory illness. If e-cigarette product use is suspected as a possible cause for a patient's respiratory disease, please obtain a detailed history of the substances used, the sources, and the devices used. Determine also if any remaining product, devices, and liquids are available for testing.

We are advising the public to contact their physician should they have any concerns. E-cigarettes should *never* be used by youths, young adults, pregnant women, and adults who do not currently use tobacco products. If you have any questions or need to report a suspect case of vaping associated severe respiratory illness, please contact the Department of Health immediately.

Oahu (Disease Reporting Line)..... (808) 586-4586  
Maui District Health Office..... (808) 984-8213  
Kauai District Health Office..... (808) 241-3563  
Big Island District Health Office (Hilo)..... (808) 933-0912  
Big Island District Health Office (Kona)..... (808) 322-4877  
After hours on Oahu..... (808) 600-3625  
After hours on neighbor islands.....(800) 360-2575 (toll free)

Thank you for your vigilance and efforts to help protect our community.

Sincerely,



Sarah Y. Park, MD, FAAP  
State Epidemiologist

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