



Department of Health and Human Services  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
286 Water Street  
11 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011  
Tel: (207) 287-8016; Fax (207) 287-9058  
TTY Users: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

## Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

### PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

**To:** Health Care Providers  
**From:** Dr. Siiri Bennett, State Epidemiologist  
**Subject:** **Vaping-associated Pulmonary Illness – Call for Cases – Maine, 2019**  
**Date / Time:** Wednesday, August 21, 2019 at 4:00PM  
**Pages:** 3  
**Priority:** **High**  
**Message ID:** 2019PHADV021

#### Abstract:

**Summary:** The purpose of this health advisory is to alert clinicians to reports of severe pulmonary disease linked to e-cigarette product use, or “vaping”.

As of August 15, 2019, 94 possible cases of severe lung illness associated with vaping have been reported in 14 states since June 28, 2019. Clusters are occurring in multiple states, including Wisconsin, Illinois, California, Indiana and Minnesota, primarily among adolescents and young adults. Additional states have alerted federal CDC to possible (not confirmed) cases and investigations into these cases are ongoing. There is no conclusive evidence that an infectious disease is causing the illnesses. While some cases in each of the states are similar and appear to be linked to e-cigarette product use, more information is needed to determine the etiology.

Clinicians should consider vaping-associated pulmonary illness in the evaluation of patients with significant respiratory illness and a history of vaping. Patients presenting with significant respiratory illness of unclear etiology should be asked about their use of vaping products. For patients who have used vaping products, clinicians should ask about the extent of use, the type of instrument used, the type of vaping liquid used, and the place of purchase.

It is not yet known if similar cases are occurring in Maine.

**Reporting:** Maine CDC asks that clinicians report cases with onset on or after May 1, 2019, that meet the criteria of (1) significant respiratory illness of unclear etiology and (2) a history of vaping. All suspect cases should be reported by phone to Maine CDC’s 24/7 disease reporting and consultation line at 1-800-821-5821 or by fax to 1-800-293-7534 using the [Disease Reporting Form](#) (attached).

## Vaping-associated Pulmonary Illness – Call for Cases – Maine, 2019

The purpose of this health advisory is to alert clinicians to reports of severe pulmonary disease linked to e-cigarette product use, or “vaping”.

As of August 15, 2019, 94 possible cases of severe lung illness associated with vaping have been reported in 14 states since June 28, 2019. Clusters are occurring in multiple states, including Wisconsin, Illinois, California, Indiana and Minnesota, primarily among adolescents and young adults. Additional states have alerted federal CDC to possible (not confirmed) cases and investigations into these cases are ongoing. There is no conclusive evidence that an infectious disease is causing the illnesses. While some cases in each of the states are similar and appear to be linked to e-cigarette product use, more information is needed to determine the etiology.

Clinicians should consider vaping-associated pulmonary illness in the evaluation of patients with significant respiratory illness and a history of vaping. Patients presenting with significant respiratory illness of unclear etiology should be asked about their use of vaping products. For patients who have used vaping products, clinicians should ask about the extent of use, the type of instrument used, the type of vaping liquid used, and the place of purchase.

It is not yet known if similar cases are occurring in Maine.

**Reporting:** Maine CDC asks that clinicians report cases with onset on or after May 1, 2019, that meet the criteria of (1) significant respiratory illness of unclear etiology and (2) a history of vaping. All suspect cases should be reported by phone to Maine CDC’s 24/7 disease reporting and consultation line at 1-800-821-5821 or by fax to 1-800-293-7534 using the [Disease Reporting Form](#) (attached).

Below is the federal CDC alert that was sent on August 16 via a [Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity \(COCA\) Clinical Action Message](#) to U.S. healthcare systems and clinicians about the illnesses and what to watch.

---

### CDC Urges Clinicians to Report Possible Cases of Unexplained Vaping-associated Pulmonary Illness to their State/Local Health Department

#### Background

*The following is an updated version of the information posting sent to public health officials via CDC’s Epidemic Information Exchange system (Epi-X) on August 2, 2019.*

As of August 14, 2019, 30 cases of severe pulmonary disease have been reported to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). Using a case definition drafted by DHS, 15 cases are confirmed (ages 16-34 years) and 15 cases are still under investigation (ages 16-53 years). Patients presented with respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Symptoms worsened over a period of days or weeks before admission to the hospital. Other symptoms reported by some patients included fever, chest pain, weight loss, nausea, and diarrhea. Chest radiographs showed bilateral opacities, and CT imaging of the chest demonstrated diffuse ground-glass opacities, often with sub-pleural sparing. Evaluation for infectious etiologies was negative among nearly all patients.

Some patients experienced progressive respiratory compromise requiring mechanical ventilation but subsequently improved with corticosteroids. All patients reported “vaping” (i.e., use of e-cigarette devices to aerosolize substances for inhalation) in the weeks and months prior to hospital admission. Many have acknowledged recent use of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-containing products while speaking to healthcare personnel or in follow-up interviews by health department staff; however, no specific product has been identified by all cases, nor has any product been conclusively linked to this clinical syndrome. DHS is working with the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to investigate the possible cause of these illnesses by testing patient specimens and vaping products.

Illinois has identified 24 possible cases. Of these, 10 are considered confirmed, 12 are still under investigation, and 2 have been excluded. Other states such as NY, CA, IN, and UT have also reported possible cases of similar illness and some have issued health alerts to clinicians and healthcare providers in their states. The etiology of this illness is unclear at this time; however, active, state-specific epidemiological investigations are ongoing to better characterize the demographic, clinical, and laboratory features of cases.

### **What Clinicians Can Do**

Clinicians should always inquire about potential drug (legal and illicit) use as part of a general history. When patients present with respiratory or pulmonary illness, especially of unclear etiology, clinicians should ask about the use of e-cigarette products (devices, liquids, refill pods and/or cartridges) for “vaping”. If possible, inquire about the types of drugs (legal or illicit) used and methods of drug use (e.g., smoking, “vaping”).

CDC recommends that clinicians report cases of significant respiratory illness of unclear etiology and a history of vaping to the appropriate state and/or local health department.

It is important to consider all possible causes of illness in patients presenting with these symptoms, even if they report a history of e-cigarette product use. Clinicians should evaluate and treat for other likely causes of illness (e.g., infectious or other) as clinically indicated. Evaluation for common infectious etiologies when also suspected should be pursued and less common infections, and rheumatologic or neoplastic processes considered, as clinically indicated. Aggressive supportive care in these possible or suspected cases is warranted, and in severe cases, pulmonary, infectious disease and critical care specialists should be consulted.

If an e-cigarette product is suspected as a possible etiology of a patient’s illness, it is important to inquire what type of product as well as if the patient is:

- using commercially available devices and/or liquids (i.e. bottles, cartridges or pods);
- sharing e-cigarette products (devices, liquids, refill pods and/or cartridges) with other people;
- re-using old cartridges or pods (with homemade or commercially bought products); or
- heating the drug to concentrate it and then using a specific type of device to inhale the product (i.e., “dabbing”).

Healthcare providers should also ask patients about any retained product, including devices and liquids, in order to ascertain availability for possible testing to be coordinated by the local/state health department.

State health department officials seeking technical assistance with an epidemiological investigation or laboratory testing can discuss with their state health department laboratories or contact CDC by email at: [VapingAssocIllness@cdc.gov](mailto:VapingAssocIllness@cdc.gov).

### **What is CDC Doing?**

CDC is actively assisting state health departments with their epidemiological and laboratory investigations by facilitating information sharing between state health departments, providing assistance in the development of data collection tools and health communication materials, and identifying options to facilitate laboratory testing of vaping products and solutions. Public health officials wanting to discuss possible cases can contact CDC by emailing: [VapingAssocIllness@cdc.gov](mailto:VapingAssocIllness@cdc.gov).

### **For More Information**

- Wisconsin Department of Health: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/outbreaks/index.htm>
- Illinois Department of Health: <http://dph.illinois.gov/news/illinois-department-public-health-warns-hospitalizations-potentially-tied-vaping>
- Information on electronic cigarettes and similar devices: [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic\\_information/e-cigarettes/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/index.htm)
- For assistance with management of patients suspected of illness related to recreational, illicit, or other drugs: Call your local poison control center at: 1-800-222-1222.