



Date: August 22, 2019

To: Healthcare Facilities Administrators and Staff

From: San Joaquin County Public Health Officer *KB*

Subject: Health Alert: Severe Acute Pulmonary Disease Associated with Cannabis or Cannabidiol Oil Vaping

Current Situation

San Joaquin County Public Health Services (SJCPHS) has been notified, by the California Department of Public Health, of an increase in severe acute pulmonary disease associated with cannabis or cannabidiol oil vaping. Since June 2019, at least 20 cases of severe acute pulmonary disease in previously healthy adults ranging in age from 15y-61y with a median age of 27y have been reported throughout the state. Cases were among residents of multiple counties. This number of cases greatly exceeds the number otherwise expected since June. The patients presented with progressive respiratory distress, sometimes initially diagnosed with pneumonia or bronchitis, and some with preceding fevers and gastrointestinal symptoms. All cases failed to respond to an initial course of antibiotic treatment. All patients required admission to the hospital with significant respiratory support, including high-flow oxygen, bilevel positive airway pressure (BIPAP), or intubation with mechanical ventilation. Diagnoses included pneumonitis and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Patients have improved with systemic steroids.

Evaluation for infectious etiologies has been negative to date in all patients. All patients reported vaping in the weeks prior to hospital admission, and a reported common exposure between these patients is that they have been vaping cannabis or CBD oils. The names and types of products used remain unknown, and patient interviews are ongoing. Other states have reported recent similar cases.

Background

Vaping refers to the increasingly popular practice of inhaling vapor from an e-cigarette device, which works by heating a liquid that can contain nicotine, marijuana, or other drugs. The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown. The liquids used in e-cigarettes are largely unregulated, and they can contain toxic chemicals that can cause lung damage.

Case Definition

A case is defined as meeting the following criteria:

- Severe acute pulmonary disease (including but not limited to pneumonitis and ARDS);
- Requiring admission to a hospital and respiratory support (including but not limited to high-flow oxygen, BIPAP, or intubation with mechanical ventilation);
- No infectious etiology defined;
- Recent history of vaping; or recent change in vaping products
- Symptom onset on or after June 1, 2019.

Recommendations for Providers

- Clinicians are asked to remain alert for potential cases among persons presenting with severe acute pulmonary symptoms, and ask these patients about their recent history of vaping, especially a recent change in product.
- Clinicians who become aware of cases similar to those described above should report them to SJCPHS at 209-468-3827 or info@sjcphs.org.
- If the patient has a vaping product in hand, please collect, hold and notify SJCPHS.

This is an ongoing investigation. SJCPHS will send updates as changes in recommendations and case definitions arise.