



April 2020

Dear New Yorkers,

On behalf of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, I want to update you regarding the serious public health outbreak of e-cigarette, or vaping, product use-associated lung injury (EVALI). As of March 2020, federal, state and local health officials are continuing to investigate over 2,800 possible cases of EVALI, mostly involving people under 35. This number includes more than 50 cases and three deaths in New York City (NYC) and more than 60 deaths nationwide. All cases involved e-cigarette use.

The EVALI outbreak is especially concerning in light of the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. In addition to EVALI, vaping may also affect lung health in other ways. Since COVID-19 can also affect the lungs, vaping may increase risk of severe illness.

The symptoms reported in the EVALI outbreak related to e-cigarette use include:

- Coughing, shortness of breath or chest pain
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or stomach pain
- Fever, fatigue or weight loss

E-cigarettes are devices that heat a liquid into aerosol (mist). When people use e-cigarettes (also called vaping), they inhale this aerosol. E-cigarettes can also be called vapes or vape pens. E-cigarette liquids do not contain tobacco but almost always contain nicotine, which is addictive, and flavors. E-cigarettes can also be used with THC (the ingredient in cannabis, also known as marijuana, that produces the “high”) oil and other substances.

While vitamin E acetate, an additive in some THC-containing vaping products, is strongly linked to the outbreak, no single chemical or type of product has been linked to every case of EVALI. Vitamin E acetate is in many food and skin care products. It is safe when eaten or put on the skin. However, research suggests that vitamin E acetate affects lung function when it is breathed in. As not every case of EVALI can be linked to vitamin E acetate, other chemicals in THC or nicotine vaping products may also be involved in the outbreak.

The Health Department currently recommends the following.

For New Yorkers using THC vaping products:

- Do not use any THC vaping products, especially products purchased online or through informal or social networks. Products that appear to be from licensed retailers in other states may be counterfeit or unregulated (for example, “Dank Vapes” or “Exotic Carts”). The contents of cartridges may not match the label and may vary. Cannabis products, including THC vaping products, are not legal or regulated in New York State (NYS), unless for medical use through the NYS Medical Marijuana Program.
- If you are a certified patient in the Medical Marijuana Program, talk with your health care provider about potential alternatives to vaping products while the investigation is ongoing. For additional information, contact the state’s Medical Marijuana Program at 844-863-9312.

If you continue to use THC vaping products:

- Do not modify or add any substances (such as vitamin E acetate) to products that were not intended by the manufacturer.
- Avoid sharing products. This can increase risk of passing infections, like flu and COVID-19.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you develop any of the symptoms listed above.

For New Yorkers using nicotine vaping products:

- Consider using FDA-approved nicotine replacement medications (patch, gum, lozenge, spray and inhaler) instead of vaping or smoking cigarettes.
- Talk with your health care provider about these and other strategies to cope with nicotine withdrawal and cravings, and how to reduce the risk of developing EVALI. Call, text or use your patient portal before visiting your provider. Use telemedicine instead of an in-person medical visit, if possible. New Yorkers who need assistance with stopping vaping or smoking can also:
  - Visit [nysmokefree.com](https://nysmokefree.com) or call 866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487) to talk to a quit coach and ask about eligibility for a free starter kit of nicotine medications.
  - Talk to a local pharmacist for advice, including about over-the-counter medicine options.
  - Youth and young adults (ages 13 to 24) can also text “DROPTHEVAPE” to 88709 to join a texting support program.
- Avoid sharing products, as this can increase risk of passing infections, like flu and COVID-19.

If you are a parent and your child has the symptoms listed above, and a possible history of vaping, seek medical attention for your child. Talk to your children about the risks of vaping and the recent outbreak of vaping-related lung injury:

- Discuss the current high risks of vaping as the investigation continues.
- Answer questions about e-cigarettes or cigarettes while encouraging an open, ongoing conversation.
- Share your concerns and acknowledge how hard it is to resist peer pressure.

Additionally, vaping products should never be used by youths, young adults, or people who are pregnant. Adults who do not currently use tobacco products should not start using vaping products.

For more information about e-cigarettes, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://nyc.gov/health) and search for **e-cigarettes**. For more information about the outbreak, visit [cdc.gov](https://cdc.gov) and search for **EVALI**. For more information about COVID-19, visit [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/health/coronavirus).

Thank you for your help protecting our communities.

Sincerely,



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Commissioner  
New York City Department of  
Health and Mental Hygiene