



Separating Fact From Fiction on Vaping, E-Cigarettes and Lung Illnesses

What's causing the outbreak of lung illness?

- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has not yet identified any single product or category of products as the principal cause of the outbreak of pulmonary illnesses.
- But according to the CDC: “Among patients with data on substances used in e-cigarettes, or vaping products, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-containing product use was reported by 76.9% (36.0% reported exclusive THC-product use).”¹
- The majority of these products appear to be illicit, or counterfeit THC oils.
- Deaths reported so far appear to be caused by lipoid pneumonia or eosinophilic chemical pneumonitis, diseases known to be caused by the inhalation of oils.
- Former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb has warned against confusing the illegal THC market with the legal nicotine market. On September 26, he noted:

“Reading transcripts, it seems there’s too much conflating these tragic lung injuries with store-bought brands of regulated, legal e-cigs like Juul and NJOY; and far too little blaming THC, CBD, and bootleg nicotine vapes - where so far, the only available hard evidence points.”²

Is this happening in other countries where e-cigarettes are legal?

- Similar cases have been identified before in the U.K. but the cause of these cases was found to be the use of synthetic cannabis product called Spice.³
- In the European Union, where e-cigarette use is widespread, there have not been similar outbreaks.
- Public health experts overseas agree that the primary cause of the U.S. outbreak is likely to be illicit THC products. For example, Linda Bauld, professor of Public Health at the University of Edinburgh and one of the world’s foremost experts on e-cigarettes notes:

“The evidence accumulating in America points to contaminants in black market products as having caused these cases, particularly cannabis oils that are being vaped. Nicotine-containing flavored vaping products are almost certainly not the main cause.”⁴

1. Perrine CG, Pickens CM, Boehmer TK, et al. Characteristics of a Multistate Outbreak of Lung Injury Associated with E-cigarette Use, or Vaping—United States, 2019. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. ePub: 27 September 2019.

2. Gottlieb, Scott. Twitter. September 26, 2019. <https://twitter.com/ScottGottliebMD/status/1177160230616084480>

3. BBC News. “Spice vape: Warning as nine collapse in Greater Manchester.” 16 July, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-49001669>

4. Science Media Centre. “Expert reaction to Trump’s decision to ban flavourings in e-cigarettes.” September 12, 2019. <https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/expert-reaction-to-trumps-decision-to-ban-flavourings-in-e-cigarettes/>

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