




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Stephanie Y. Hayden, Director 

DATE: September 17, 2019

SUBJECT: Update on Outbreak of Severe Lung Disease Associated with Electronic Cigarettes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health organizations are investigating a multistate outbreak of lung disease associated with electronic cigarette products. The CDC reports that as of September 12, 2019, there have been 380 cases of lung disease reported across 36 states and one U.S. territory. In Texas, 25 cases of severe lung disease were reported. As of last week, six deaths have been reported in six states.

Austin Public Health will continue to monitor this outbreak, conduct surveillance, and update Mayor and Council on any new developments. This memorandum provides staff recommendations, past and present staff efforts and relevant data for your reference.

Austin Public Health Response and Recommendations

Austin Public Health (APH) recommends that people refrain from electronic cigarette use as it can result in unintended injuries, such as acute nicotine exposure or severe pulmonary disease. APH will be conducting social media outreach alongside our community partners to warn people about the dangers of electronic cigarette use and is advising those individuals who do use electronic cigarettes not to buy the products off the street, modify or add substances to the products.

APH is working with the Texas Department of State Health Services to monitor the situation through local syndromic surveillance systems which can identify local cases of severe lung disease associated with electronic cigarette usage. To date, no cases have been identified in Austin or Travis County. Travis County Medical Society physicians have been notified of this emerging health issue.

Previous APH efforts have included the creation of a [flyer](#) on electronic cigarettes and an educational presentation for school administrators, staff, and parents. The Community Services division of APH will include electronic cigarette presentations at the upcoming Austin Youth Council meeting, the quarterly training for Peer Health Educators and at the Austin/Travis County Adolescent Health Collaborative.





Prevalence of Electronic Cigarette Use

There are challenges associated with county-level data on electronic cigarette usage; however statewide data from 2017 show that 19.8% of adults have used an electronic cigarette or other electronic vaping product (Source: Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System). Electronic Cigarettes are used more commonly by youth than adults, and usage rates are increasing. Four percent (4%) of adults are current electronic cigarette users, however, among Texas high school students, over 10% of students are current electronic cigarette users (Sources: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Texas Youth Risk Behavior Survey). Nationally, use from 2017 to 2018 increased by 78% among high school students and 48% among middle school students (Source: National Youth Tobacco Survey).

Other Health Impacts of Electronic Cigarettes

The long-term dangers of electronic cigarettes are still emerging. According to Health & Human Services, electronic cigarettes are particularly dangerous for youth because nicotine is harmful to the developing adolescent brain. There is a strong link between electronic cigarette use and use of other tobacco products. Some evidence also shows a link to alcohol use and other substance use.

Additionally, some electronic cigarette products can be used to deliver other drugs. The secondhand aerosol that comes from electronic cigarettes can contain harmful chemicals (including nicotine), ultrafine particles, heavy metals, and flavoring linked to serious lung disease. As of August 31, 2018, the American Association of Poison Control Centers reports there have been nearly 3,000 poison control cases related to electronic cigarettes and liquid nicotine.

Staff is preparing a press release for distribution and is prepared to respond to any media inquiries. If you have any questions, or if I can provide additional information, please contact me at (512) 972-5010 or via email at Stephanie.Hayden@austintexas.gov.

Cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Chris Shorter, Assistant City Manager

