

First death from vaping-associated lung disease reported in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today reported the state's first death from a vaping-associated lung injury, a woman in her 60s from Hampshire County, to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She was among the 121 suspected cases that have been reported to DPH since September 11 when Massachusetts began mandating that clinicians immediately report any unexplained vaping-associated lung injury to the department.

Of the 121 suspected reports, 9 cases have been confirmed and 10 are probable for meeting the CDC's definition of vaping-associated lung injury, nearly double the number of cases DPH reported a week ago to the CDC. At least 39 reports are for patients who have been ruled out as having vaping-associated lung injury.

With the number of suspect cases rising statewide and nationally, Governor Charlie Baker announced on September 24th a public health emergency and a four-month statewide ban on sales of all vaping products in Massachusetts. The sales ban applies to all vaping devices and products, including tobacco and marijuana.

"The number of confirmed and probable cases of vaping-associated lung injury we're seeing continues to escalate and today I was deeply saddened to hear about the death of a patient who had this illness," said Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD., MPH. "We are investigating these cases as quickly as possible and working with our federal partners to better understand this outbreak."

DPH issued a clinical advisory on September 11 asking

providers to report any case of a person experiencing otherwise unexplained progressive symptoms of shortness of breath, fatigue, chest pain, cough, or weight loss, of any severity, and an abnormal chest imaging study associated with vaping. The suspected cases are to be reported to DPH via a form and sent to a confidential fax line.

As of October 1, a total of 1,080 lung injury cases associated with using e-cigarette or vaping products have been reported to the CDC from 48 states and 1 U.S. territory. Eighteen deaths have been confirmed in 15 states, not including the Massachusetts death reported today. All patients have reported a history of using e-cigarette or vaping products. No single product has been linked to all cases of vaping related lung injury.

As a result of Massachusetts' public health emergency, the Commonwealth implemented a statewide standing order for nicotine replacement products that allows people to access products like gum and patches as a covered benefit through their insurance without requiring an individual prescription, similar to what the Baker Administration did to increase access to naloxone, the opioid antidote. Individuals who are vaping are encouraged to call the Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit makingsmokinghistory.org or Mass.gov/QuitVaping to connect to treatment.

Also, Massachusetts recently relaunched two public awareness campaigns, "Different Products, Same Danger" and "The New Look of Nicotine Addiction", aimed at educating parents and middle and high school-aged youth about the dangers of vaping; the campaigns are appearing on social media channels and billboards statewide. More information on both campaigns is available at getoutraged.org. Materials are also available for download on the Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse website.

DPH's guidance for local boards of health, health care

providers, and retailers can be found on its website at mass.gov/vapingemergency.