



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We need your help in addressing the emerging epidemic of severe lung disease associated with using e-cigarette products, which has been linked to multiple deaths and sickened hundreds of people across the nation, including several in Fairfax County.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are working with state health departments to determine what might be causing the illnesses. Reported symptoms include cough, shortness of breath and fatigue, with symptoms growing worse over days or weeks leading to difficulty breathing and, in many cases, admission to the hospital. Other symptoms may include fever, chest pain, nausea and diarrhea. Patients report “vaping” (i.e. the practice of inhaling and exhaling the vapor produced by an e-cigarette or similar device) in the weeks and months before becoming ill. Although no specific product has been linked with the disease, many of the patients vaped marijuana oil, extracts, or concentrates (also known as “dabbing”).

While Public Health authorities investigate additional cases, there are actions our Fairfax community can take to increase awareness, prevent, and reduce the use of e-cigarettes among our youth and young adults. The Fairfax County Health Department, in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health, is engaging community providers to promote their awareness, early diagnosis and reporting. As the investigation evolves, CDC recommends that anyone concerned about these specific health risks should refrain from using e-cigarette products. In addition, anyone who uses e-cigarette products should not buy these products off the street or modify or add any substances to the products that are not intended by the manufacturer. **As a parent, you can help by talking to your children about the risks of e-cigarette use and expressing your expectation that they remain tobacco and drug free.**

E-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among youth. They come in many shapes and sizes and are sometimes called “e-cigs,” “e-hookahs,” “mods,” “vape pens,” “vapes,” “tank systems,” and “electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS).” In spite of being fairly new, in 2018, more than 3.6 million U.S. middle and high school students reported using e-cigarettes in the past 30-days. In Fairfax County, among students surveyed in 8th, 10th and 12th grades, 16.7% reported vaping nicotine and 8% reported vaping marijuana in the past 30-days. E-cigarettes are popular because they are considered less harmful than regular cigarettes and many believe, incorrectly, that they are just flavored water vapors.

The full spectrum of disease and long-term health effects of vaping are not yet fully known because e-cigarettes are still fairly new. E-cigarette products contain harmful substances such

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as nicotine – the addictive drug in regular cigarettes, cigars and other tobacco products known to harm adolescent brain development, which continues into the early or mid-20s.

Severe respiratory illness is a newly recognized complication of vaping. Individuals with a history of vaping who are experiencing breathing problems should seek medical care right away. Visit https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html to learn more about vaping-related illnesses.

With your help, we can start a new and impactful conversation about the harmful effects of e-cigarettes. By working together, we can prevent and reduce the use of e-cigarettes among Fairfax County youth and reverse this emerging public health threat.

Sincerely,



Gloria Addo-Ayensu, MD, MPH
Director of Health