

Iowa Needs to End Youth Vaping

As the teen use of e-cigarettes continues to rise and the vaping-related respiratory illness health crisis grows across Iowa and our nation, the Iowa Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Commission believes it is time for our state legislators to take action.

The CDC has reported 1086 respiratory and lung injury illnesses over the last few months with 275 new cases in the last week of September alone. There have been 33 confirmed deaths. Most patients have reported the use of vaping and e-cigarette products containing THC. However, products and devices that do not contain THC have also been reported. Case numbers will likely continue to increase as the CDC investigation into the cause of lung injury continues.

Here in Iowa, there have been 38 reported lung injury cases. We are thankful that there have been no confirmed deaths. However, several of the patients have serious lung damage that may continue to make them vulnerable for the remainder of their lives.

According to the New England Journal of Medicine, national rates of teen vaping more than doubled between 2017 and 2019, with over 25% of 12th graders reporting vaping in 2019. In Iowa, e-cigarette use more than doubled between 2016 and 2018, with 22.4% of 11th graders reporting vaping in 2018. With nearly 400 vape flavors, like cotton candy and bubblegum, it is clear these products are designed to appeal to teens and go unnoticed by adults.

Several states have already placed a temporary ban on the sale of electronic smoking devices (ESDs). The Iowa Statehouse needs to take action and recognize youth vaping as a growing public health emergency. Legislators must recognize the nicotine in ESDs comes from the tobacco plant; therefore, vaping products like e-cigarettes should be considered tobacco products and receive the same regulation. Here are specific legislative priorities the Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Commission recommends in 2020:

- Include e-cigarettes under the Iowa Smokefree Air Act, which would eliminate vaping in all public places, just like cigarette smoke.
- Begin to tax alternative nicotine and vaping products at their cigarette equivalent and significantly increase Iowa's cigarette excise tax, which will greatly reduce sales of both ESDs and cigarettes.
- Raise the purchase age for tobacco and all nicotine products to 21. This legislation should also prohibit online sales of vaping products.
- Begin regulating and lowering the concentration of nicotine in e-cigarettes and ban the sale of all flavored nicotine vaping products in Iowa. Unflavored or tobacco-flavored vaping products would be exempt.
- Restore state funding for tobacco and nicotine prevention, education and treatment to a total of 12 million dollars annually. The current \$4 million budget of the IDPH Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Division is less than 2% of the state's total tobacco revenue.