Harris County Public Health Confirms Vaping-Related Lung Illness and Launches Youth Vaping Prevention Program

HOUSTON — After thorough investigation, Harris County Public Health (HCPH) has identified three individuals with confirmed or probable vaping-related lung illness. All three are teens.

Across the U.S., multiple deaths and hundreds of lung illness cases associated with the use of e-cigarettes and vaping have been confirmed by CDC, and are under investigation.

“The spike in youth vaping, and vaping-related deaths and lung illness are alarming,” said Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Executive Director for Harris County Public Health. “That’s why HCPH recommends all community members not use e-cigarette products, until the investigation is concluded.”

People who have trouble breathing, a cough, chest pain, nausea, fatigue or other symptoms in the days or months after vaping should seek immediate medical attention. Individuals vaping as a means to stop smoking should use FDA-approved products.

In 2018, 1-in-5 high schoolers vaped – a 78% increase from 2017, and 1-in-20 middle schoolers vaped (a 48% increase), according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To combat the growing concern, HCPH today announces its new Youth Vaping Prevention Program to decrease and prevent vaping among students in fifth through 12th grades.

The free program is available to schools and youth groups. Trained HCPH facilitators provide:

- 45-minute education sessions detailing the dangers of vaping, how it affects the body and how the products are falsely marketed
- Strategies on how to resist peer pressure to vape
- Vaping cessation counseling for those who have become addicted to vaping

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HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.
“This program is so important for our community, right now,” added Shah. “We must educate our youth on the dangers of vaping and youth leaders on how to recognize when kids are doing it. Prevention is key.”

E-cigarettes or vapes can look like USB drives, watches, candy packages and other everyday items, which can keep adults from knowing their child is vaping. Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development. They can also contain heavy metals such as lead, nickel and tin, cancer-causing agents, ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs and flavoring such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to a serious lung disease. E-cigarettes can also be used to vape THC and other chemicals.

Regardless of the ongoing investigation:

- Anyone who uses an e-cigarette or vaping product should not buy these products (e.g., e-cigarette or vaping products with THC or CBD oils) off the street and should not modify or add any substances to these products that are not intended by the manufacturer.
- Youth and young adults should not use e-cigarette products.
- Women who are pregnant should not use e-cigarette products.
- Adults who do not currently use tobacco products should not start using e-cigarette products.

Schools or youth groups interested in HCPH’s Youth Vaping Prevention Program can call 713-274-8500.

HCPH is currently investigating other individuals who may have become ill after vaping and will provide an update on its tobacco and vaping-cessation webpage every Wednesday by 12noon.

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