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Health officials report death in a patient hospitalized for vaping-related lung injury

Patient had underlying lung disease and experienced medical complications

Minnesota health officials have confirmed the first death in the state associated with an outbreak of serious lung injuries related to vaping. The Minnesota patient was over 65 years old and died in August after a long and complicated hospitalization.

According to Minnesota State Epidemiologist Dr. Ruth Lynfield, the patient had a history of underlying lung disease and was hospitalized with a severe lung injury that progressed to include other conditions. Investigators looking into the case after the patient died found the lung injury was associated with vaping illicit THC products.

“Our sympathies go out to the family of the person who died,” Governor Tim Walz said. “This tragedy and the serious injuries suffered by others show the stakes of this outbreak. Health officials are working hard to determine a cause and share information to prevent additional injuries. As that work continues, I urge Minnesotans to follow their guidance.”

Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm said health officials continue to work aggressively to gather information and determine what has caused these lung injuries.

“One death from this outbreak is one death too many,” Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm said. “We are working with our partners around the state and the nation to find out everything we can as quickly as we can to prevent additional illnesses and deaths.”

To date, Minnesota has 17 patients who have been classified as confirmed or probable cases. An additional 15 potential cases are under investigation. Patients have been hospitalized for days to weeks, including many in the intensive care unit. Of those cases who have been interviewed, all reported vaping illicit THC products. Many also reported vaping other products including those that contain nicotine.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 450 potential or confirmed cases of severe lung injury have been reported in 33 states and one jurisdiction. CDC indicates that many of these cases reported using cannabinoid products, such as THC.

Health officials continue to investigate the cases looking for a specific factor that might have caused the lung injuries. At this point no cases in Minnesota have been associated with use of cannabis vaporization products acquired solely through Minnesota’s medical cannabis program. The Minnesota Department of Health may learn more as the investigation continues and will work with the state’s medical cannabis manufacturers to keep program participants updated.

Meanwhile, people should avoid vaping illicit THC products, as the available evidence shows many of the injury cases had exposure to such products. Also, people with a history of vaping who are experiencing lung injury symptoms should seek medical care. People experiencing symptoms should avoid using e-cigarettes and other vaping products.

In Minnesota, symptoms among cases included shortness of breath, fever, cough, and vomiting and diarrhea. Other symptoms reported by some patients included headache, dizziness and chest pain.

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