

OPINION

Ebel: Vaping Related Lung Injuries Prompt Overdue Action

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist Published 11:56 a.m. ET Nov. 9, 2019

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), state and local health departments, and other clinical and public health partners are investigating a multi-state outbreak of lung injury associated with use of e-cigarette, or vaping, products. As of late October, over 1,600 cases of e-cigarette, or vaping, product use associated lung injury (EVALI) have been reported to CDC from 49 states (all except Alaska), as well as 34 deaths, and the numbers continue to rise.

The explosion of vaping among youth in our high and middle schools has been a cause for alarm in the education and public health systems for the past few years. Adolescents are especially sensitive to nicotine's addictive effects because their brains are still developing. Nicotine can have long term impacts on brain development and can result in rewiring of the adolescent brain to make them more easily addicted to other drugs. Nicotine addiction may also lead to future tobacco use, and all the negative health impacts associated with those products.

The health effects of vaping have not been adequately studied, and while the FDA has the authority, they have not finalized safety regulations on the vaping industry or their products, so we may continue to see more short and long-term health impacts over time.

Prior to the vaping related disease outbreak, some states, and many cities (including over 30 in Ohio) have passed Tobacco-21 legislation, raising the age to purchase tobacco and vaping products to 21. I have continued to advocate for these locally-enforced regulations in Licking County.

On Oct. 17, it became illegal to give, sell, or otherwise distribute cigarettes, other tobacco products, or alternative nicotine products like e-cigarette/vaping products to any person under the age of 21 in Ohio. When selling tobacco products and alternative nicotine products like e-cigarette/vaping products to anyone under the age of 21, both the person selling the products and the owner of the retail establishment may face criminal penalties that increase after the first violation under Ohio's Tobacco 21 law.

Raising the purchase age will certainly make it more difficult for teens to gain access to tobacco and vaping products, but it will take more than a regulatory change to see real impacts. Ohio will need to either change the way that tobacco compliance checks are done, or increase funding, to assure state-wide T-21 regulation compliance. Schools and health departments will need to provide education to students about the health risks of vaping, much like we have historically done for tobacco use.

Flavored vaping "juices" including fruit and candy flavors, make these products more attractive to children and teens. States, including Ohio, and federal regulators are considering bans or restrictions on flavored vaping products. The public health community strongly supports these proposed regulations.

For youth that have already started vaping and are thinking about quitting, the free, confidential, My Life, My Quit program can help them do it successfully. Text "Start My Quit" to (855) 891-9989 or call to talk with a coach who is ready to listen and cheer you on.

Adults can call 1 (800) QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) to contact Ohio's quit line or call the Licking County Health Department cessation program at (740) 349-4532 for quitting assistance and referrals.

Joe Ebel is the Licking County Health Commissioner

Read or Share this story: <https://www.newarkadvocate.com/story/opinion/2019/11/09/ebel-vaping-related-lung-injuries-prompt-overdue-action/4108594002/>