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## **JOINT HEALTH ADVISORY**

### **Alameda County and City of Berkeley**

#### **SEVERE ACUTE PULMONARY DISEASE ASSOCIATED WITH CANNABIS OR CANNABIDIOL OIL VAPING**

August 22, 2019

#### **CURRENT SITUATION**

Since June 2019, at least 20 cases of severe acute pulmonary disease in previously healthy adults were reported in California. Cases were first identified as a cluster of patients seen in Kings County. Cases are among residents of multiple counties in Northern and Southern California.

Patients presented with progressive respiratory distress, sometimes initially diagnosed with pneumonia or bronchitis, and some with preceding fevers and gastrointestinal symptoms. All cases failed to respond to an initial course of antibiotic treatment. All patients required admission to the hospital with significant respiratory support, including high-flow oxygen, bi-level positive airway pressure (BIPAP), or intubation with mechanical ventilation. Diagnoses included pneumonitis and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Patients have improved with systemic steroids.

A reported common exposure among these patients is that they have been vaping cannabis or cannabidiol (CBD) oils. Evaluation for infectious etiologies has been negative to date in all patients and no specific product or devices have been implicated.

California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is working with local health departments to investigate cases of severe lung disease associated with vaping cannabis and working to analyze vaping products recovered from patients. Nearly all patients reported vaping cannabis products in the weeks prior to hospital admission.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Vaping refers to the increasingly popular practice of inhaling vapor from an e-cigarette device, which works by heating a liquid that can contain nicotine, marijuana, or other drugs. The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown. The liquids used in e-cigarettes are largely unregulated, and they can contain toxic chemicals that can cause lung damage.

#### **CASE DEFINITION**

A case is currently defined as meeting the following criteria:

- Severe acute pulmonary disease (including but not limited to pneumonitis and ARDS)
- Hospital admission requiring respiratory support (including but not limited to high-flow oxygen, BIPAP, or intubation with mechanical ventilation)
- No infectious etiology defined
- Recent history of vaping
- Symptom onset on or after June 1, 2019

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROVIDERS

- Remain alert for potential cases among persons presenting with severe acute pulmonary symptoms, and ask these patients about their recent history of vaping.
- Be aware that patients were seen in primary care and initially diagnosed with pneumonia or bronchitis, but did not respond to antibiotics.
- If you become aware of cases, similar to those described above, please report cases to Alameda County Public Health Department at 510-267-8020 M-F 8:30am-5:00pm or by email to: [ACPHD-Surveillance@acgov.org](mailto:ACPHD-Surveillance@acgov.org) or secure FAX at 510-273-3744.
- For City of Berkeley residents please call the City of Berkeley Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit at 510-981-5292 M-F 8:00-5:00pm or FAX to 510-981-5345.
- If the patient has product in hand, please collect, and hold cartridges and vaping devices for testing, and contact your local health department.