



MEDIA RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Case of vaping-associated pulmonary illness confirmed in Knox County

Knoxville, Tenn. – The Knox County Health Department (KCHD) has received verification from the Tennessee Department of Health of a confirmed case of pulmonary illness possibly related to e-cigarette use, or vaping, in Knox County. The case is expected to recover. KCHD is working closely with the Tennessee Department of Health, following standard disease investigation protocols, to identify a possible cause of the illness.

“Given the activity in the rest of the U.S., we’ve been expecting a case and believe more are likely,” said KCHD Senior Director Dr. Martha Buchanan. “It is still early in the investigation, but it’s important for the public to be aware of the symptoms and the potential link with e-cigarettes.”

Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, fever, chest pain, nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea, with symptoms progressing in severity over a period of days or weeks. Anyone with these symptoms who also uses e-cigarettes or vaping devices is encouraged to seek medical care from their health care provider. Last week, the Tennessee Department of Health issued a call for health care providers across the state to report to public health any suspect cases of serious respiratory illness they treat among patients who use electronic cigarettes or other vaping devices.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is investigating a cluster of severe pulmonary disease among people who use e-cigarettes or vape, with more than 193 cases reported to date in 22 states, not including Tennessee. One death has been reported in Illinois. Similar to the national cases, available evidence does not suggest that an infectious disease is the primary cause of illness. By definition, a confirmed case has no bacterial or infectious agent present, which has been ruled out through laboratory testing.

Different names are associated with e-cigarettes, including e-cigs, vapes, e-hookahs, Juul, vape pens and electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). Some e-cigarettes look like traditional cigarettes, cigars or pipes, while others look like USB flash drives or pens. According to the CDC, e-cigarettes have the potential to benefit adult smokers who are not pregnant if used as a complete substitute for regular cigarettes and other smoked tobacco products. E-cigarettes and other vaping devices, however, are not harmless. They are not safe for youth, young adults, pregnant women or adults who do not currently use tobacco products. While e-cigarettes have the potential to benefit some people and harm others, more evidence is needed to determine whether e-cigarettes are effective for quitting smoking. Additional research can help understand long-term health effects.

About Knox County Health Department

The Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is a governmental agency dedicated to making every person a healthy person. As the first health department in Tennessee to achieve national accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, KCHD’s mission is to encourage, promote and assure the development of an active, healthy community through innovative public health practices. The organization conducts disease surveillance, prevention and control; emergency preparedness; nutrition and physical activity promotion; tobacco use prevention; health equity promotion; immunizations; and much more. For more information, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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