



**GOVERNMENT OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Centers for Disease Control Issues Vaping Warning

CDC gives clear vaping warning: Avoid THC, e-cigs bought "off the street"

The Centers for Disease Control and Protection ("CDC") warned this past Friday against the purchase of electronic cigarette cartridges containing THC or other cannabis or altered e-cigarette products that are counterfeit or "off the street". These counterfeit products can either be sold in stores, or from unauthorized persons/locations. Up to 354 possible cases in 29 states and the territories, double the number reported last week, of vaping-related lung illness are under investigation. A growing number of cases in the Virgin Islands are also being investigated and those persons who are experiencing symptoms are requested to report these to their physician and Department of Health. Federal and state officials are urging the millions of Americans who use these products to stop vaping until the cause of the illnesses are identified. The Department of Health urges Virgin Islanders to stop vaping until this investigation is resolved.

Patients have experienced cough, shortness of breath and chest pain. Some also have had nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, fatigue, fever, weight loss or other issues. The symptoms typically develop over days, but sometimes can manifest over several weeks. The gastrointestinal symptoms sometimes preceded respiratory symptoms. Suspected cases have resulted in serious lung damage, other complications and death.

"Anyone who uses e-cigarette products should not buy these products off the street (e.g., e-cigarette products with THC, other cannabinoids) and should not modify e-cigarette products or add any substances to these products that are not intended by the manufacturer," the government officials said. E-cigarettes can contain harmful or potentially harmful substances, including nicotine, heavy metals

(e.g. lead), volatile organic compounds and cancer-causing chemicals. Some e-cigarette products are used to deliver illicit substances and may be acquired from unknown or unauthorized sources.

CDC warned that young people and those in early adulthood should not use e-cigarettes, as well as pregnant women and adults who don't use tobacco. Those who do should watch for symptoms including cough, shortness of breath or chest pain and seek medical treatment in those cases.

It is suspected that most cases are the result of adulterated or contaminated products involving THC or other cannabinoids from marijuana. The cutting, flavoring, or solvents used in producing these products “off the street”, without regulatory testing, are possible culprits. Former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb believes it is unlikely that large national e-cigarette companies, such as Juul, are the cause because cases do not appear to be spread evenly across the nation.

The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) has received reports of counterfeit Juul cartridges being sold within the territory and Commissioner Designee Richard Evangelista has assigned the DLCA Law Enforcement Officers to investigate and take whatever action is necessary to remove the dangerous products from the shelves. It is impossible to know what chemicals are being sold in counterfeit and/or “off the street” products, until they are reported and tested.

Both hospitals in the Territory, Schneider Regional Medical Center and Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center are monitoring incoming patients for potential exposure to vaping.

Recommendations for the Public

1. While this investigation is ongoing consider refraining from using e-cigarette products.
2. Regardless of the ongoing investigation, anyone who uses e-cigarette products should not buy these products off the street (e.g., e-cigarette products with THC, other cannabinoids) and should not modify e-cigarette products or add any substances to these products that are not intended by the manufacturer.
3. Regardless of the ongoing investigation, e-cigarette products should not be used by youth, young adults, pregnant women, as well as adults who do not currently use tobacco products. If you use e-cigarette products, monitor yourself for symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, chest pain) and promptly seek medical attention if you have concerns about your health. CDC and FDA will continue to advise and alert the public as more information becomes available.
4. Adult smokers who are attempting to quit should use evidence-based treatments, including counseling and FDA-approved medications. If you who need help quitting tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, contact your doctor.
5. If you are concerned about harmful effects from e-cigarette products, call your local poison control center at: 1-800-222-1222.
6. If you have a medical emergency, please seek immediate medical attention.
7. We encourage the public to submit detailed reports of any unexpected tobacco or e-cigarette-related health or product issues to the FDA via the online Safety Reporting Portal:
<https://www.safetyreporting.hhs.gov>.

8. Any suspect cases can be submitted to Dr. Esther Ellis, Territorial Epidemiologist
esther.ellis@doh.vi.gov

9. Need to report to DLCA any suspected counterfeit products. Consumers can contact the Office of the Commissioner on St. Croix at 340-713-3522; St. Thomas at 340-714-3522; or on St. John at 340-693-8036; or by email consumerawareness@dlca.vi.gov