Federal health authorities say investigating vaping-related illnesses is a priority as the caseload has grown to 530 patients including seven deaths.

More than half of patients are 25 years or younger, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“We at CDC are very concerned about the occurrence of life-threatening illness in otherwise healthy young people reported from around the country,” CDC Principal Deputy Director Anne Schuchat, M.D., said in a news conference Thursday.

Illnesses have been reported in 38 states and one territory. The deaths have occurred in California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota and Oregon.

About 72% of the patients have been male. Roughly 67% are ages 18-34 years, 17% are 35 and older, and 16% are under 18, according to Dr. Schuchat.

Patients have complained of difficulty breathing, shortness of breath and/or chest pain. Some also experienced diarrhea, vomiting, fever and fatigue, according to the CDC. In many of the cases, patients had used e-cigarettes with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

“Although the investigation continues, no consistent e-cigarette or vaping product, substance, additive or brand has been identified in all cases nor has any one product or substance been conclusively linked to lung injury in patients,” Dr. Schuchat said.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has collected more than 150 vaping product samples for analysis.

“FDA is analyzing these samples for the presence of a broad range of chemicals including nicotine, THC and other cannabinoids along with opioids, cutting agents or diluents and other additives, pesticides, poisons and toxins,” said FDA Center for Tobacco Products Director Mitch Zeller, J.D.

Zeller also said the FDA’s Office of Criminal Investigations has launched its own investigation, but is focusing on the supply chain and is not aiming to prosecute patients
who have used illicit substances.

The CDC recommends people consider not using vaping products while the investigation continues. Those who do use them should not purchase products off the street.

Youths, young adults and pregnant women should never use e-cigarettes. In addition to containing toxic chemicals, they are addictive and harmful to developing brains. However, new data reported Wednesday found about 25% of 12th graders reported recent vaping, more than double the rate in 2017.

The CDC encourages clinicians to consider vaping-related illnesses in patients with lung disease, collect detailed information on the products patients were using and report suspected cases to their state health department. Detailed guidance from the CDC is available at https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00421.asp. For information about the collection of e-cigarette products for possible testing by the FDA, email FDAVapingSampleInquiries@fda.hhs.gov.

The CDC also encourages the public to report any unexpected tobacco or e-cigarette-related health or product issues to the FDA’s online Safety Reporting Portal, http://www.safetyreporting.hhs.gov.

Resources
CDC e-cigarette website for health care providers
AAP Julius B. Richmond Center of Excellence e-cigarette website
AAP policy “E-Cigarettes and Similar Devices”
Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org about e-cigarettes
Pediatrics e-cigarette article collection
Surgeon general’s interactive website about e-cigarettes geared toward parents and others who work with youths

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