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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Florida Teens are Going to the Hospital with Serious Respiratory Issues



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is warning parents and teens about an alarming new health scare. Reports are emerging of Florida teens being rushed to the hospital with COVID-19 like symptoms after using e-cigarette products—some having to be placed on ventilators. The patients test negative for the novel coronavirus, however they vape. Health experts are concerned that the underaged use of e-cigarettes may be exacerbating the COVID-19 crisis—potentially putting minors who vape at an increased risk of complications from the virus.

Even before COVID-19 spread into Florida, underage vaping was a growing problem. The Florida Department of Health recently announced 119 cases of vaping-related pulmonary illnesses statewide, and it was reported just last month, that teens were being hospitalized in the Orlando area with COVID-19 like symptoms that proved to be unrelated to COVID, but rather, were the effects of vaping.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “These reports are extremely concerning. Most Americans are paying extra attention to their health right now and taking steps to avoid contracting COVID-19. We know that most young people are not as susceptible to some of the more serious effects of the virus unless they have a preexisting condition. But, for teens who vape, we are now hearing that vaping may cause damage to their young lungs and is even more devastating when combined with COVID-19.

“I am a mother. This is scary stuff. Please talk to your kids about the COVID-19 pandemic and how vaping may put them at increased risk of suffering the more harmful effects of the novel coronavirus. Let them know that kids their age are being rushed to the hospital not because of COVID-19—but because of vaping. Also, take the time to talk to them about addiction and how nicotine can be habit forming. This conversation may be more important now than ever before.”

Dr. Jenna Wheeler, MD, Pediatric Critical Care Physician at Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children said, “Over the past several weeks, we have seen a substantial rise in teen vaping related cases in our hospital that have resulted in critical lung injuries. It is especially important during these stressful times that parents talk to their children and educate them on the dangers and potential life-threatening side effects of vaping. It is absolutely more dangerous than most people think.”

According to a 2019 Florida Department of Health report, e-cigarette use among Florida high school students increased 63 percent from 2017 to 2018. The report indicates that nearly one in four Florida high school students now admits to vaping. Another study found two-thirds of young people did not know that certain vaping products contained nicotine.

Attorney General Moody is a leader in the fight to stop underage vaping in Florida. Since taking office, Attorney General Moody:

· Announced Florida is leading a 39-state coalition of attorneys general in investigating the vaping company, JUUL;
· Launched the most comprehensive state vaping investigation publicly acknowledged to date—looking into the marketing and selling practices of e-cigarette products by more than 20 companies selling in Florida;
· Joined 42 attorneys general in urging leading streaming companies to limit tobacco imagery content on their platforms; and
· Embarked on a statewide fact-gathering mission to determine the cause and solutions for the teen-vaping epidemic in Florida.

Last week, Attorney General Moody filed complaints against two Florida companies selling vaping products in Florida and marketing nicotine products to minors. For more information on the recent actions, click here.

During the 2020 Florida Legislative Session, Attorney General Moody worked with state lawmakers on a bill to prevent the sale and marketing of vaping products to minors. SB 810 would strengthen age-verification requirements; ban flavors that attract kids; bringing age restrictions in line with federal guidelines; and require vaping education classes for minors caught in possession of e-cigarette devices and products. The legislation passed both houses of the Florida Legislature, but has not yet been sent to the Governor.