

# **Sen. Durbin Calls on Surgeon General to Launch National Strategic to Educate About Youth Vaping Epidemic**

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CHICAGO – U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today called on the U. S. Surgeon General to develop and launch a national strategy to educate, prevent, and respond to the youth e-cigarette epidemic. Durbin’s letter to U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams comes on the heels of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) announcement this week that it would imminently ban all non-tobacco e-cigarette flavors, including mint and menthol. Preliminary data revealed this week shows that five

million children are “frequently” vaping – therefore, a national strategy led by the Surgeon General is needed to help address a wave of youth nicotine addiction and prevent the transition to cigarettes or harmful nicotine devices.

**“Due to years of delay and inaction from the FDA, we now have 5 million children using e-cigarettes. While I support FDA’s long-overdue announcement to remove all e-cigarette flavors from the market, we cannot ignore the reality that many of these children may now have nicotine addictions,” Durbin wrote. “We need a strategy in place, immediately, to help these children and ensure that the worst-case scenario does not arise—a lifetime of nicotine addiction driving children to combustible cigarettes or adulterated, counterfeit, or illegal nicotine products.”**

To date, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported 380 confirmed and probable cases of lung disease linked to vaping, as well as six deaths, in Illinois, Oregon, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, and California.

Illinois has 52 confirmed cases of vaping-related lung disease – with 12 more cases under investigation – and one reported death from vaping-related illness. The median age of vaping-related lung disease in Illinois is 22 years old, with the youngest reported victim being 15 years old. Seventy-six percent of patients in Illinois needed to be placed in an intensive care unit (ICU), and 41 percent of the patients were mechanically ventilated.

According to the most recent public health data from CDC, America has seen a 32 percent increase in the number of high-school children using e-cigarettes – with five million teens currently using e-cigarettes. This alarming increase comes on top of a 78 percent increase in the number of high-school children using e-cigarettes in 2018, and a 48 percent increase in the number of middle-school children using these addictive and dangerous products.

In March, Durbin and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), along with U.S. Representatives Diana DeGette (D-CO-01) and Jamie Raskin (D-MD-08), reintroduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation to crack down on kid-friendly flavorings in highly-addictive e-cigarettes and cigars. The [\*Stopping Appealing Flavors in E-Cigarettes for Kids \(SAFE Kids\) Act\*](#) will place strong restrictions on e-cigarette flavorings and ban cigar flavorings altogether.

Full text of today’s letter is available [here](#) and below:

September 13, 2019

Dear Surgeon General Adams:

The explosion of youth use of e-cigarettes has been characterized as an “epidemic” by all leading public health officials, and new data this week reveals that 5 million children are vaping. At the same time, an alarming cluster of more than 380 cases of severe respiratory illness associated with vaping has led to hospitalizations and six deaths, including one in my state of Illinois. As our nation’s doctor, I urge you to use your expertise and leadership to immediately launch a national strategy to educate, prevent, and respond to the youth e-cigarette epidemic.

This week, the Acting Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) revealed that 5 million teenagers are now vaping. Today, one in four high school students are using e-cigarettes, a 32 percent increase in the past year—on top of a 78 percent increase in 2018. Shockingly, this increase has been mirrored in middle-school students across our country.

As a father of two teenage boys, I know you share my concern about e-cigarette use among our nation’s children. And as Surgeon General, I applaud your December 2018 advisory on youth e-cigarette use. But more action is needed to confront the current crisis, as many children receive dangerously high nicotine levels from the addictive JUUL device.

To combat this insidious public health threat, I urge you to immediately establish a national youth e-cigarette awareness, prevention, and response strategy that focuses on stopping kids from picking up this dangerous habit and helping children currently vaping. Due to years of delay and inaction from the FDA, we now have 5 million children using e-cigarettes. While I support FDA’s long-overdue announcement to remove all e-cigarette flavors from the market, we cannot ignore the reality that many of these children may now have nicotine addictions.

We need a strategy in place, immediately, to help these children and ensure that the worst-case scenario does not arise—a lifetime of nicotine addiction driving children to combustible cigarettes or adulterated, counterfeit, or illegal nicotine products. This initiative must engage children and families in schools, at home, and in the community—and I urge you to launch programs and disseminate resources to reach every child and family in America to halt this looming crisis. I appreciate your engagement on this issue, and will assist in any way I can.

Sincerely,