

Vaping Factsheet

This document is intended to educate and inform policymakers about vaping in light of ongoing concerns regarding vaping-related illnesses and deaths across the country. While no cause has been identified, it is critical to note that nicotine, legal cannabis, and illicit cannabis vaping are vastly different and all discussions about the product categories and related regulations should remain separate.

What Is Vaping?

Vaping is a popular mode of consumption for nicotine and cannabis users due to its ease-of-use, discrete nature, and perceived health benefits compared to traditional smoking.

The process of vaping most commonly refers to heating a liquid, containing nicotine or cannabis-extracted oil, to a temperature that turns active compounds into vapor rather than smoke, which is inhaled by the consumer.

Nicotine vaping products are commonly referred to as “e-cigarettes” while cannabis vaping products are commonly called “vape pens.” Vape pens are comprised of a battery and a pre-filled, tamper-evident cartridge. There are hundreds of licensed and regulated cannabis vape manufacturers in California alone and they have sold more than 27 million lab-tested cannabis cartridges to licensed retailers since adult use cannabis was legalized in January 2018.

Not All Vaping Is Equal

There are significant differences between vaping nicotine, legal cannabis, and illicit market cannabis products, including ingredients, testing standards, regulations, consumer access and medical imperative.

Nicotine vape products and the ingredients used in them are loosely regulated and widely available. Many nicotine vaporizers are “open source,” allowing users to concoct their own “e-juice” by mixing separate ingredients and flavorings at home. There is limited standardization of nicotine vape ingredients and, as a result, difficulty determining how the varied ingredients and combinations work in the body.

Legal cannabis vape products, however, are produced by state-licensed manufacturers under strict regulations and testing standards. These standards have been created by the California Department of Public Health, Bureau of Cannabis Control and several other state and local agencies. California has the strictest cannabis testing standards in the nation. All products sold in California are required to post certified test results with passing scores for pesticides, microbials, heavy metals and foreign matter before they can be released for sale to retailers and consumers.

Vape cartridges and pods from licensed manufacturers can only be purchased from licensed outlets, such as dispensaries and delivery services, and are only available pre-filled and sealed, which prevents tampering after 3rd party testing has been completed. These measures ensure the cannabis product meets California's rigorous quality control standards and requirements. Additionally, California regulations require licensed manufacturers to list all ingredients on the packaging.

Illicit cannabis vape products are untested and unregulated. The ingredients used in these products are often low-quality, unsafe for inhalation, and misrepresented to consumers.

While the use of tobacco and e-cigarettes is entirely “recreational,” cannabis consumption is not. For many people, cannabis is a much-needed medicine and many medical users have found vaping to be the most effective means of consumption. The integrity of the ingredients in medicinal cannabis products is critical to the health of medical users.

Moreover, absent unnecessary additives, legal cannabis vaping has a strong safety profile over decades of medical use.

Ingredients and Sourcing Matter

The cause of vape-related deaths and illnesses in recent months is still under investigation to determine the dangerous ingredient(s) that recently entered the illicit cannabis supply chain. While the use of additives in vape products is not new, acute respiratory illnesses and sudden deaths related to vaping are.

There are a number of additives used in the majority of e-cigarettes and some legal cannabis vaping products such as thinning, thickening, and flavoring agents that are approved for use in consumer products (these include vitamin E acetate, a substance some public health agencies and media reports have cited as a potential cause of recent illnesses). While these additives are considered safe for ingestion, there is no general consensus that they are safe for inhalation.

The continued use of these additives in vaping products requires additional research and safety testing. Illicit cannabis

vaping products often contain significant amounts of these ingredients as well as other explicitly dangerous components.

The Danger of Illicit Cannabis Vapes

Completely unregulated and untested, illicit cannabis vapes often have dangerously high levels of pesticides, toxic solvent residue, heavy metals and other adulterants not permitted in the legal cannabis market. They typically contain significant amounts of the additives described above to dilute the cannabis oil without noticeably altering the appearance or flavor, thus increasing profits for illicit dealers at the expense of the consumer's health. There is no regulatory oversight over these products and they are sold by illegal, unlicensed dispensaries and delivery services, and on streets across the state/country.

The problem commonly starts at the source: illegal cultivation sites typically supply the cannabis used to create illicit vaping products. Researchers at the Integral Ecology Research Center [tested](#) soil, water and other ecological samples from

backwoods cultivation sites that were raided in 2018 and found "highly deadly toxic chemicals" in 89% of the samples.

Illicit cannabis vapes may also contain other dangerous compounds not found in the regulated market. A handful of recent case studies [suggest](#) that synthetic cannabinoid derivatives can cause acute respiratory depression and death. The presence in illicit vapes of a chemical commonly found in rat poisons prompted the U.S. FDA to [issue a warning](#) in 2018.

Furthermore, illicit cannabis concentrates often contain toxic levels of solvent residue from the oil extraction process, including hexane, a known neurotoxin. The resulting oil is typically put into low-quality cartridge/vape hardware that can leach heavy metals into the oil.

Consumers can avoid these dangerous ingredients only when they have access to regulated and tested products, which they do in California thanks to the State's licensing and mandatory testing and quality assurance standards.

Banning Cannabis Vapes Won't Work

Vaping is the second most popular form of cannabis consumption in California. A vape ban would drive consumers to the illicit market and increase the number of illnesses and deaths from dirty, untested, and unregulated products. It will also renew and fuel illicit market crime, which has been on the decline in California since the introduction of the legal cannabis program.

A ban would also deprive hundreds of thousands of patients that rely on legal cannabis for medicinal purposes, often for debilitating diseases and conditions that have been unresponsive to traditional medicine, and would haphazardly push those patients towards illicit products that may be less effective and more harmful, particularly for those with compromised immune systems, organs, or physical abilities.

The Answer? Stop Illicit Cannabis Vaping

As leaders in the regulated cannabis industry, we recommend that state policymakers aggressively pursue the illicit market and take the following actions to reduce risks to consumer health and safety:

- 1 Shut down unlicensed dispensaries, delivery services, and mail order services by empowering regulators to seize illegal products and impose hefty fines on unlicensed retailers.
- 2 Further invest in Get #Weedwise, the statewide campaign to educate consumers about how to identify licensed dispensaries and delivery services - and why it matters.
- 3 Allow only licensed manufacturers to produce and import vape cartridge equipment, and mandate that vaping cartridge hardware be produced in ISO and GMP compliant facilities.
- 4 Encourage licensed manufacturers to deploy anti-counterfeiting measures on cannabis vape products.

This document was prepared by [Bloom Farms](#) and [CannaCraft](#), two prominent, community-oriented cannabis companies licensed to operate in California.

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