

Vaping triggers health issues for Florida teens



By CINDY KRISCHER GOODMAN

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL |

AUG 31, 2019 | 10:00 AM



Ben Frier says he has breathing issues from vaping. Lawyer Jonathan Gdanski represents teens in Florida and across the country with health issues from e-cigarettes. (Felipe Calderon)

Along with school safety, parents now have to worry about another real danger — teen vaping, nicotine addiction and the resulting health problems.

Florida teens are among those across the country who have become addicted to nicotine through electronic cigarettes and are experiencing serious health issues as a result.

On Friday, U.S. health officials put out an alert saying they are investigating 215 possible cases of severe lung disease associated with vaping across 25 states. They are working with state and local health departments to track the outbreak. In Illinois, one person with a history of recent e-cigarette use was hospitalized and died. Earlier this month, a Florida college student posted on Instagram that his lung had collapsed and required surgery after he smoked Juul pods for a year.

Throughout the state, teen health complaints from e-cigarettes range from seizures to shortness of breath to severe migraines and respiratory illness. Ben Frior, a 19-year-old Hollywood teen, said vaping for three years caused him such shortness of breath that he found it difficult to exercise.

He started smoking e-cigarettes in high school when his friends were doing it, and was unaware that the mango-flavored vapor was full of highly addictive nicotine. Three weeks ago, the struggle to get air became so bad that Frior quit vaping.

“Withdrawal sucks but my breathing is a little better and my throat feels better,” he said.

Like Frior, Bailey Legacki started using the Juul brand of e-cigarettes when she was about 15 years old and in high school and now finds her lungs compromised. Legacki said she suffers from chronic migraines and breathing issues and wheezes often. While the health issues are enough to make her want to quit, she wakes up in middle of the night to vape and says she can’t stop the addictive habit.

As teens like Frior and Legacki report health issues, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention says it is trying to better understand why people are getting sick from vaping and needs more information to understand whether there’s a relationship between specific products and the reported illnesses.

The American Lung Association has weighed in recommending the public not use e-cigarettes, and the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended the minimum age to purchase e-cigarettes be raised to 21 from 18.

Along with the health complaints from young people in South Florida, a Sarasota teen says she has suffered seizures after using e-cigarettes and has sued the manufacturer Juul Labs, the most well-known maker of the vape pens. Her lawsuit, filed by Schlesinger Law Offices of Fort Lauderdale, accuses electronic-cigarette manufacturer Juul Labs Inc. of illegally underplaying the dangers of its product to expand its appeal among teen users. The suit also alleges Juul is liable for failure to warn its customers about nicotine addiction. In July, the firm asked the court to stop Juul from selling its vape pens, claiming Juul did not get the proper pre-market approval before it began selling its product. Jonathan Gdanski, a lawyer with the Schlesinger firm said. “Nicotine addiction is a serious disease,” Gdanski said. “It’s a preventable and under-treated drug addiction.”

Gdanski said his firm has filed several cases against Juul around the country on behalf of young people who are suffering health issues from vaping. He said his office has received thousands of calls from parents, teens and people in their 20s who started vaping as teens.

“This is a health epidemic at every level and people are turning to lawyers for help,” he said.

While the dangers of smoking cigarettes are well documented, the risks of vaping — whether nicotine, flavoring or THC — are still relatively unknown and only beginning to surface. Rather than containing tobacco, an e-cigarette has liquid with nicotine, flavorings and chemicals contained in the cartridges. Electronic cigarettes have been available in the U.S. since about 2007.

Educators, school districts and medical organizations are responding to the increasing popularity of vaping among teens. In April the Florida Department of Health’s Bureau of Tobacco Free Florida **launched a statewide campaign**, E-Epidemic: Vaping and Youth, to give parents and educators the

latest facts on youth vaping and the highly addictive properties of e-cigarettes. While the law says, someone must be 18 to buy e-cigarettes, that hasn't stopped young people from buying them. In Davie, when a convenience store clerk was arrested for selling vape pens to underage teens, one teen started a GoFundMe page to raise bail.

In 2018, about 25% of Florida high school students reported current use of electronic vaping — a 58% increase compared to 2017, according to the Florida Youth Tobacco Survey.

Just last week, the city of Fort Lauderdale **proposed a ban on e-cigarettes**, e-pipes, vapor products, or hookah to anyone younger than 21. Nationwide, at least 475 other cities and 18 states also have raised the age for buying e-cigarettes to 21, the same threshold for buying beer or liquor.

In response to the recent health concerns and scrutiny, Juul says it has taken steps to combat underage use of its e-cigarettes. The company has shut down its social media pages, pulled some of its flavored from of retail stores and introduced an age-verification systems for retailers to use.

Cindy Krischer Goodman can be reached

*at **cgoodman@sunsentinel.com**, 954-356-4661, Twitter and Instagram @cindykgoodman*



Cindy Krischer Goodman

South Florida Sun Sentinel

CONTACT

Cindy Krischer Goodman covers the health beat for the South Florida Sun Sentinel, providing readers information on healthcare delivery, consumer news and public policy. Cindy is an award-winning journalist, former business columnist, and 32-year veteran of the South Florida news industry. She also is a Florida native and double UF grad.