

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 11, 2019

Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road SE
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Redfield,

I write to express serious concerns about the multistate outbreak of severe lung disease associated with e-cigarette use. This mystery illness, first publicly identified at the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, has sickened hundreds of Americans, including over 30 individuals in my home state of Wisconsin. In addition, six deaths have already been reported in conjunction with this illness. As cases continue to be identified and the prevalence of e-cigarette use among children and teenagers rises, I ask that you provide more information about how your agency is supporting states in their response to this outbreak and urge you to provide additional support to address this public health threat, including by activating an Emergency Operations Center.

In July, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin identified eight teenagers who were hospitalized with seriously damaged lungs. All reported vaping in the weeks and months prior to their hospitalization. These cases were reported to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), which took immediate action and made a statewide announcement asking clinicians to report on additional cases. Soon after, DHS was contacted by public health officials and providers in other states and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was quickly dispatched.

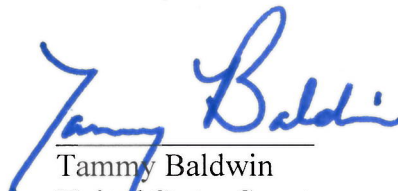
My home state has been on the frontlines of this outbreak, from identifying the first cases to working with CDC to develop a specific case definition but we need additional help from the CDC. In an effort to ensure that local health departments, providers, and families have the information and resources that they need, I ask that you respond to the following requests and questions.

1. I understand that CDC has established an Incident Management System (IMS) to support the use and coordination of resources for states in responding to this outbreak. While this is an important step, the CDC has yet to activate an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which could provide a more robust working platform, better staffing capabilities, and the opportunity to improve coordination among partners and experts. Given the mysterious nature of this illness, as well as the increasing number of cases and deaths nationwide, I urge CDC to activate an EOC. Furthermore, I request that CDC provide more information on the metrics used to determine if an EOC should be activated and additional details on how an EOC could further support states in their response.

2. I continue to hear concerns from officials on the ground about the complicated nature of this outbreak, and the need for experts from across the epidemiological spectrum who can examine cases from different perspectives. Please work with states to ensure that experts from across offices and centers are deployed appropriately to identify the cause of this outbreak.
3. Both CDC and FDA continue to characterize this outbreak as a “mystery illness”, and have yet to identify a specific device or substance as a cause. How are CDC and FDA working together, and with state health departments, to analyze samples coming from patients across the country? Can you provide more information on the progress that has been made in testing the range of chemicals commonly used in these products?
4. Between 2014 and 2018, e-cigarette use among Wisconsin high school students increased by 154 percent and it is now estimated that one out of every five students are using e-cigarettes. How is the CDC working to ensure that information about this serious outbreak is being distributed to young people, and how does this inform CDC’s larger effort to prevent youth from using e-cigarette products?

We are in the midst of a serious nationwide outbreak first identified in teenagers. I urge CDC to take action to support states in their response to this crisis, including by activating an EOC that can provide the resources necessary for understanding the cause of this illness and preventing future cases.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator