

Army warns of 'emerging public health threat'

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Army medical leaders said Tuesday that a rash of North Carolina troops being hospitalized for serious medical issues believed to have been caused by vaping oils is a priority.

The remarks come one day after the U.S. Army Public Health Center issued a public health alert stating that approximately 60 soldiers and Marines in the state experienced serious medical issues after using e-cigarettes or vaping products that were marketed as containing cannabidiol, or CBD, oil. The cases occurred over the course of a few weeks.

"We consider this emerging public health threat a top priority, and the Army Public Health Center continues to monitor this issue and provide updates as new information becomes available," said Chanel S. Weaver, a spokeswoman for the center. "Consumers must be extremely vigilant if they are going to use vaping oils and should seek medical attention immediately if they feel they are having an adverse reaction to one of these products."

The Army Public Health Center, based at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, is tasked with promoting health and preventing disease, injury and disability in the Army community.

Most of the hospitalized troops have been treated at the Naval Medical Center at Camp Lejeune, officials said. Nine of the suspected cases have been treated at Womack Army Medical Center on Fort Bragg.

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Army warns troops about potentially dangerous vaping oils

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Service members have reported headaches, nausea, vomiting, palpitations, dilated pupils, dizziness, disorientation, agitation and seizures, officials said. Those are all symptoms associated with synthetic cannabinoids.

Officials said complications from the seizures may have resulted in significant neurologic damage in one soldier and accidents resulting from seizures are blamed for the deaths of two Marines.

A spokeswoman from Naval Medical Center Camp Lejeune said those deaths did not occur at the hospital. It is not immediately clear where the two Marines were treated.

The Army Public Health Center has cautioned troops to make sure that vaping products they purchase do not contain CBD oil, concentrated THC or man-made chemicals meant to replicate the effects of marijuana.

Such products are readily available off post, but the Army prohibits soldiers from using them. The Public Health Center issued an alert after medical facilities on Fort Bragg and

Camp Lejeune reported an increase of emergency room visits believed to have been caused by such products.

Approximately 60 service members from the two installations have reported potentially serious medical problems after using e-cigs and other vaping products.

“Although pure CBD oil has not yet been associated with adverse health effects, CBD vape oils most likely contain synthetic cannabinoids, concentrated tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and/or other hazardous compounds in addition to, or in place of, CBD oil,” officials said.

While the use of CBD oil, or other products derived from marijuana, among soldiers is banned by Army regulations, officials said they believed the adverse health effects to be caused by man-made chemicals meant to replicate those chemicals.

“Although pure CBD oil has not yet been associated with adverse health effects, CBD vape oils most likely contain synthetic cannabinoids, concentrated tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and/or other hazardous compounds in addition to, or in place of, CBD oil,” officials said.

The alert cautioned troops to make sure that vaping products they purchase do not contain CBD oil, THC or synthetic cannabinoids.

“This problem has the potential to spread quickly across the Army,” officials said. “Although some vape oils claim to contain CBD oil, CBD, THC, and/or synthetic cannabinoids, many vape oils do not disclose that they may contain illegal and/or potentially hazardous substances to include synthetic cannabinoids. Even consumers who may not be seeking products containing CBD oil, CBD, THC or other synthetic cannabinoids may unintentionally purchase and use them.”

Civilian medical officials said they are not tracking similar issues believed to have been caused by vaping products.

A spokesman for Cape Fear Valley Health System in Fayetteville said the hospital was unaware of any emergency room visits caused by vaping products with CBD oil.

An official with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services’ Division of Public Health, Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch said they are not tracking CBD oil specifically nor are they aware of any emergency department visits because of it.

Weaver said the Army Public Health Center noted the rash of cases during the first week of January and that at least four other public cases have been noted in North Carolina. A similar rash of cases has been reported in Utah, where 33 troops have been treated.

“The health of our force remains a top priority, and we are working diligently to better educate our soldiers on the potentially adverse health effects associated with using vaping oils with unknown substances,” Weaver said. “The Army Public Health Center is continuing to monitor the situation and issued the Public Health Alert to notify military personnel of the potential adverse health effects associated with using vaping oils with unknown substances.”

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