

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-1304

September 13, 2019

The Honorable Dr. Jerome M. Adams  
U.S. Surgeon General  
200 Independence Ave, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

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,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator