

Drug Administration to stay on the market. Before this rule, which was adopted in 2016, the products could be sold without any review of their ingredients or how they were made.

In the coming weeks, the FDA will unveil a compliance policy that will remove all flavored e-cigarette vaping products from the market, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Secretary Alex Azar told reporters last week in the Oval Office. The primary goal is “to reverse the deeply concerning epidemic of youth e-cigarette use,” Azar said in a press release.

Legislative changes also are taking place in California. On Monday (Sept. 16), Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an executive order that directs the state Department of Tax and Fee Administration to step up enforcement of illegal or counterfeit vaping products. CDPH also will spend \$20 million on a public information campaign and create health risk signs that will be posted at stores and on advertisements.

Approximately 21 percent of high-schoolers and 5 percent of middle-schoolers vape, according to data from the 2018 National Youth Tobacco Survey. This marks a 78 percent increase among high-schoolers and 48 percent increase among middle-schoolers compared with 2017.

Preliminary data for 2019 show that the problem only has gotten

worse, with more than a quarter of high school students saying they currently vape. An overwhelming majority cited the use of fruit, menthol or mint flavors.

Bruce Baldwin, tobacco treatment coordinator for the local chapter of the California Health Collaborative, said a flavored e-cigarette ban is long overdue.

When he asks kids why they vape, they always offer the same reasons: “They like the flavor and they like the fact that it’s strong ... they get a buzz.”

Though vaping cartridges have been found to contain metal, volatile organic compounds and cancer-causing agents, “there’s been this notion that somehow vaping is safer than smoking,” he said. “To me, it’s like saying it’s safer to get run over by a Volkswagen than by a pickup.”

Ellen Michels, Butte County Public Health’s Tobacco Program project director, said her program has been urging local policy makers to adopt a ban or more stringent regulations for flavored e-cigarette products for years. So far, it has been discussed in Oroville and Chico, but not acted upon.

“At this point in time, the message really is ‘don’t vape,’” Michels said. “Don’t use anything, because we don’t know yet what’s causing these serious illnesses and deaths.” □

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