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An essential partner in protecting public health

How the 2019 vaping crisis continues to shape policy

Public health emergency

Alarm bells began ringing in April 2019. State health departments in Illinois and Wisconsin reported 53 cases of severe respiratory illness in mostly young and otherwise healthy men tied to vaping. By early summer, hundreds of cases had been reported in 49 states. In the northeast, one New England governor declared a public health emergency and issued a ban on the sale of all vaping products in the state.

After widespread product testing, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) identified illicit THC vape carts (or cartridges) as the primary culprit for the surge in what it then called Vaping-Associated Pulmonary Injury (VAPI). In late November, the CDC issued a report based on lung fluid analyses of 29 victims from 10 states that identified vitamin E oil (tocopheryl-acetate) as a "very strong culprit of concern." The oil was being added to black market THC products as a cutting agent and thickener.

Value of vaping products impacted by statewide ban

$ **$45 billion**

Crisis casualties nationwide

68
Deaths

2,807
Hospitalized

Source: CDC Final Report, February 2020

Challenge

Identification, Isolation, Quarantine

In one of the most well-regulated markets in the country, Metrc helped to coordinate the efforts of regulators, public health officials, law enforcement, and testing labs for the duration of the crisis. When the statewide vaping ban went into effect, the immediate challenge was determining how much tainted product was in the state and where it was being sold. Complicating these efforts, many vaping products lacked detailed product descriptions, making their identification difficult. As an essential first step, state officials mandated licensees supply important new information to assist in product tracking and removal. As partner to both regulators and industry, Metrc was ideally positioned to supplement these efforts and provide crucial support to quarantine measures across the state.

Track-and-trace: A powerful new crisis intervention tool

Within 48 hours of the announced vaping ban, state officials issued important new directives regarding the isolation and removal of impacted products. Metrc assisted these efforts in distributing step-by-step quarantine compliance instructions to businesses statewide. To support regulator oversight, Metrc created special digital "rooms" within its systems— a comprehensive inventory of products retailers and licensees had isolated under quarantine. In accordance with agency directives, Metrc also implemented new product categories, new naming and labeling conventions, new testing requirements, and new statewide communication protocols to supplement the crisis response.

In support of state directives, Metrc:

- Developed new quarantine protocols
- Created clearer product categories
- Enhanced supply-chain transparency
- Improved system access to test results
- Streamlined state lab data flows
- Issued new retail best-practice guidelines
- Detailed new regulatory hold procedures
- Implemented new destruction protocols
- Founded new communication channels

Highest vapi prevalence:

Delaware, Indiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Utah

Lowest vapi prevalence:

Alaska, California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington

619,000

Number of potentially harmful products removed from store shelves statewide

Unified response from government and industry

In accordance with new state regulations designed to contain the vaping crisis, Metrc served as partner to both industry and government, providing a swift and coordinated response to a frightening public health emergency. The new protocols adopted during the crisis led to enhanced emergency response, stronger and more effective oversight, more rigorous testing, and greater transparency into the content and potency of vaping carts and other THC products, all of which advance public safety.

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Metrc is the most trusted and experienced provider of cannabis regulatory systems in the United States. Our solution combines advanced software, radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology, a dedicated customer-support team, and a secure database to track and trace cannabis from growth, harvest, and processing to testing, transport, and sale.

Visit metrc.com for more information.