



February 17, 2020

Madison, IN: Update on investigation into vaping related medical situations at MCHS

On Friday, Indiana State Police had a mobile lab on campus and identified three different chemical substances tied to recent medical episodes at MCHS. Further testing is taking place at the State Department of Toxicology to confirm the chemicals, once the final report is available from the Indiana State Police we will release the information.

A ninth medical transport was confirmed from MCHS on Friday morning where a student presented with similar symptoms for the second time within a week. After further review of the cases, it was determined that at least one other student was transported three times with similar symptoms within a matter of days. “Sadly, at the end of the day, this comes down to choices these students are making”, stated Dr. Jeff Studebaker, Superintendent. “These kids are choosing to vape, they are choosing to add chemicals to an already dangerous substance, and some are making the repeated same poor choice within a matter of days”.

School Resource Officers are conducting an investigation to determine if there is a common thread of [shared] or separate devices, a common source, or pin-point a purchase location. “At this time, we are looking for answers and seeking information”, says SRO Tim Armstrong. “However, the longer this goes, the more dangerous the situation becomes - this is life threatening. In some cases, the students who were transported were treated because they were not breathing, their hearts had stopped beating - this is a very dangerous, potentially deadly situation. Should this situation turn fatal, someone will be held responsible - and it will be a very different discussion”.

Each piece of evidence analyzed contained some trace of three chemicals which are being further analyzed for confirmation. A few of them had a mixture of all of the chemicals combined, whereas others may have contained a trace of one or two of the chemical additives. “We have determined that the more chemicals found in the samples, the more severe the reactions and symptoms have been”, shared SRO and School Safety Coordinator Jacob McVey. “We are continuing to work with the Indiana State Police and Indiana State Board of Health to further test and analyze confiscated materials to be sure we know what we are dealing with”.

Officers are also trying to find out where the vaping supplies are coming from. SRO’s are tracking down leads from reports of supplies coming from China via the internet directly to homes and/or being purchased locally illegally by minors or by legal aged adults and given to minors. A new federal law increases the age for smoking and vaping from 18 to 21. Legislators are also looking at ways to stiffen penalties against retailers selling to those underage.

In addition, there is the matter of the chemicals being purchased - are these coming from the same sources or are students purchasing these separately, and if so, are these materials tainted or is it the mixture of the chemicals to the pods causing the reactions? “There are lots of questions right now that we are working to answer”, states Armstrong. “The fear we have is there is an increasing amount of tainted material in the possession of these kids and they don’t seem to care about the consequences of ingesting these chemicals. We have to get to the bottom of it quickly before someone dies.”

Symptoms in each case included elevated heart rate, dilated pupils, fluctuated breath patterns, some limpness or in some cases a loss of consciousness. “We have been lucky up to this point”, states McVey. “In some cases these kids have been on the verge of needing life-saving measures by emergency medical personnel”.

Madison Consolidated Schools is smoke-free - all facilities, all campuses, all vehicles. Madison Consolidated Schools has clearly documented policies and expectations regarding such matters with students. “Madison Consolidated Schools has been diligent in their efforts to enforce state laws regarding minors in possession of tobacco and/or electronic cigarettes. Madison’s SRO’s have submitted over forty (40) cases involving underage vaping to the Jefferson County Prosecutor’s Office since the beginning of the school year. The rise in the use of vaping devices among minors has presented new and dangerous challenges due to the combination of chemicals involved. My office is committed to working with school officials to strictly enforce laws concerning the use and sale of tobacco and electronic cigarettes to minors. The health and safety risks are too high and I hope this will be a wake-up call to youth who are choosing to engage in this dangerous behavior. As this continues to be investigated, I will be working closely with school leaders and I will also seek to work with the State Legislature on additional ways to address vaping devices in schools”, said Jefferson County Prosecutor, David Sutter.

Each year, every student is required to agree to and adhere to the policies and discipline procedures outlined in the [MCHS Student Handbook](#) and the [Code of Conduct Handbook](#). Excerpts have been included below as a convenient reminder regarding matters of discipline and investigation.

#### Search and Seizure

Search and Seizure Lockers, vehicles, and other storage areas are subject to search if there is reasonable suspicion that the student has violated a particular law or possesses an item or substance which presents an immediate danger of physical harm or illness to students and staff or corporation property. The principal or his/her designee may search student lockers, vehicles, and other storage areas at any time for any justifiable reason. The principal or his/her designee may request assistance from the Police Department if such assistance is deemed necessary. 20 Personal searches of students may be conducted by the principal or designated building administrator who has reasonable suspicion for a search of that student. Authorized searches of the student’s person are: 1. Searches of the pockets of the student. 2. Purses, backpacks, or any other object in the possession of the student. 3. Removal of an article of exterior clothing such as a jacket, shoes and socks All personal searches shall be conducted in accordance with MCS Policy 11.15. If the initial search produces no evidence of contraband, there should be no extension of a search based on simple curiosity. Anything found in the course of a search which is evidence of a student’s violation of school rules or Federal/State laws may be seized and admitted as evidence in any suspension or expulsion proceeding if it is tagged for identification at the time it is seized and kept in a secure place by the principal until it is presented at the hearing. The evidence may also be turned over to any law enforcement officer after proper notification and receipt.

#### Tiered Interventions:

LEVEL 1 - Classroom and Teacher-led Responses (e.g., written apology, talk with school counselor, detention)

LEVEL 2 Teacher-led, referred and Administrative Supported Responses (e.g., community service, peer mediation, temporary removal from class)

LEVEL 3 Administrative Supported and/or Removal Responses (e.g., restorative practices, in-school suspension, in-school intervention)

LEVEL 4 Administrative Supported and Short-Term Out-of-School Exclusionary Responses (e.g., restorative practices, mentoring programs, short-term suspension)

LEVEL 5 Long-Term Administrative Supported, Out-of-School Exclusionary, and Referral Responses (e.g., long-term suspension, expulsion, refer to alternative ed.)

### **Tobacco MCS Policy 5512**

All uses of tobacco: Cigar, Cigarette, Pipe, Snuff, Electronic “vapor” or other substitute forms of cigarettes, or any other matter or substance that contains tobacco , \*Students may be referred to the juvenile court for tobacco; alcohol/drugs/controlled substances violations per MCS policy 5620.

### **Alcohol/Drugs/ Controlled Substances MCS Policy 5530**

Unauthorized use, possession, or being under the influence of non-illegal drugs (e.g., prescription or non-prescription medication). \*Students may be referred to the juvenile court for tobacco; alcohol/drugs/controlled substances violations per MCS policy 5620.

Using, possessing or being under the influence of illegal drugs. \*Students may be referred to the juvenile court for tobacco; alcohol/drugs/controlled substances violations per MCS policy 5620.

Distributing or selling non-illegal or illegal drugs. \*Students may be referred to the juvenile court for tobacco; alcohol/drugs/controlled substances violations per MCS policy 5620.

MCS uses various methods of discipline throughout the five tiers. Disciplinary actions begin with tobacco cessation classes, written citations and fines and run up to expulsion. “Our goal and intent is to keep our students on campus and in class - that is our job”, states Studebaker. “Our feeling is if we suspend or expel every student we discipline for use of these types of products, we are failing them not only academically, but providing an easier path for use of these dangerous devices, as well as, possibly other activities that are not healthy.”

“We believe this must be a community effort which begins at home”, Studebaker continues. “Parents must be having conversations with their kids about the dangers of substance abuse and what is acceptable at home. We know there are parents who purchase these devices for their students as a “safer alternative” to smoking. We want parents and students to understand that purchasing these items is illegal if you are under the age of 21. We are committed to making our schools a safe place for all students and will work with law enforcement to break this cycle. We are thankful for the relationships we have with our city and county partners who place a high value on the safety and security of all students.”

###