

Ripple Collision of Three Epidemics: Vaping, Opioid Use, and COVID-19

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Letter to Editor

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Over 2 million Americans struggle with opioid use disorders and around 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.¹ Opioids account for a large proportion of substance use deaths, a leading cause of accidental death in the United States (US). The past few months have been especially difficult for public health specialists, policymakers, and the public with only one foe, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).² From pharmaceutical developments of novel drugs and vaccines, to thousands of publications and preprints being made online daily, the pandemic has undone decades worth progress on the opioid epidemic. The American Medical Association (AMA) notes that more than 40 US states have reported an increase in mortality related to opioid use as well as concerns for substance use disorder and mental illness.² The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) confirms an overwhelming increase in deaths due to fatal overdoses.³ The tripartite nature of the current state of epidemics must be addressed. Further, Li et al. show a positive association between the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths and the proportion of vapers suggesting that people who vape may have a higher susceptibility to COVID-19 infection.⁴ Vaping,

opioid use, and severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) have been challenging to both contain at the root level, and report scientific evidence due to no data reporting outcomes of people who vape versus those who do not.

The compounded nature of the two public health emergencies is concerned with the COVID-19 crisis, which warrants immediate focus by all healthcare communities. Along with the interruption of outpatient services, clinics, and hospitals during quarantine, the challenges to occur over the next few years may be challenging to curb. Fatal drug overdoses are linked to the synthetic opioid fentanyl which has killed around 0.5 million people in the US during the last decade.⁵ The cocktail of methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin make outcomes threatening for millions of people in the US alone. The band-aid placed on the overdose crisis might be slowly ripping off amid the ongoing pandemic. With the intense ongoing COVID-19 research worldwide and the deployment of vaccines in various parts of the world, policymakers and public health experts need to work hand in hand to further target the vaping and opioid issues as soon as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation is brought under control.

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