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Knowing the Facts: Key to Vaping Safety

✖ If you turn on the news today, chances are you'll catch a report about illnesses or deaths caused by vaping. Not only is there a lot of confusion among users as to whether the products that they are using are safe, but the government is also starting to take note of this smoking method, in which users inhale the vapors of e-cigarettes or vape pens.

"It's a real issue, especially with the proliferation of black-market THC products out there," explained Christopher Cowart, founder of Blue Moon Hemp. "The vast majority of victims were using cartridges containing THC, and in most cases, these products were counterfeit or were purchased in an

illegal fashion.

“Unfortunately, there is a concentrated effort to spin the narrative to ban all flavored e-liquids,” he continued. “This is despite the fact that these types of cartridges are not associated with anything that we as CBD providers do.”

According to Cowart, one ingredient common to these vaping incidents is Vitamin E, which while safe when used topically or in a liquid capsule form, can be harmful when vaped. Often used as an inexpensive cutting agent for THC oils, it can cause irritation and infection in the lungs, resulting in severe respiratory illness. Left unattended, it can lead to even more serious outcomes, including death.

“It’s important that people understand what they’re buying for their own safety,” said Cowart, who adds that his interest in educating the public isn’t just for professional reasons. “This issue is very personal to me; two sisters who live in my condo complex vacationed in Mexico, and the younger sister bought a black-market THC cartridge. She vaped and got sick, and she died five days later.”

Cowart says that the most important thing that buyers can do is to know what they’re buying, and that their products come from reputable sources. “All of our products are plant-based, non-GMO, and organic when we can, and everything is third-party tested,” he said, adding that none of Blue Moon’s products contain tobacco or nicotine. “We’ve sold more than 1 million products without a single incident.”

Blue Moon Hemp was a pioneer in putting a QR code on its labels, so that customers could read the test results themselves and verify that what they were consuming was what was on the label and in the bottle.

“When we started in 2015, there were only half a dozen CBD companies out there, and we figured it out as we went,” Cowart said of what was then a dense regulatory landscape. “The industry has exploded since; there are now at least 1,600 CBD and CBD-related companies out there.

"The people getting in now are buying products and reselling them from who knows where?" he added.

As a responsible seller, Cowart believes that there needs to be more regulation in the industry, which should include seed to store traceability, GRS (generally recognized as safe ingredients), truth in labeling, third-party testing, and the requirement that CBD sellers not make medical claims.

"We welcome reasonable FDA regulation that would create a safety network for products going into the marketplace," Cowart said, adding that this might knock out some of the more worrisome "mom and pop" operations that can't afford the cost of compliance.

"You need to know where a company is sourcing its CBD, and whether that's domestic or foreign," he added. "There is good foreign CBD, but I don't trust China or India at this point. You also have to have third-party testing and information on the label in terms of potency, and to know that there are no heavy metals, herbicides, pesticides, or other toxic materials used. You want to know what you're putting in your body."

While a public comment period did take place this summer in Washington, it generally takes between 18 and 36 months for the FDA to come up with regulatory guidelines. "From what I understand, there is real pressure being applied to come up with this outline more quickly; I don't think the legislative piece will take two years," said Cowart, adding that Blue Moon is hoping to see something definitive in the first or second quarter of 2020.

In the meantime, Blue Moon continues to expand both its product line, experimenting with a full-spectrum distillate, and debuting a beauty and skin care line. The company is also continuing its foray into retail, establishing mall kiosks and experimenting with vending machines that require age verification.

"We believe that CBD will continue its upward trajectory because the efficacy of the product drives its success," he

said. "People are discarding other medications and supplements in favor of CBD, because once they try it, they continue to use it. It puts the body into homeostasis, and any time the body is in balance, it is a good thing."

To learn more, visit www.bluemoonhemp.com. Sister site www.swissrelief.com also has same-sourced CBD items not available in the Blue Moon Hemp line.

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