

# California is taking vaping giant Juul to court

By Patrick McGreevy Staff Writer  
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California and Los Angeles County officials announced a lawsuit against Juul Labs Inc. on Monday, alleging the vaping brand targeted young people through advertising and failed to give warnings about health risks posed by using e-cigarettes with nicotine.

Although the state bars sales of the devices to people younger than 21, the lawsuit alleges electronic cigarette firms made products with nicotine that appealed to young smokers by marketing flavors such as mango, cool mint, crème brûlée and cucumber.

“We’ve worked too hard, committed our hard-earned money for too long combating harmful tobacco use to stand idly by as we now lose Californians to vaping and nicotine addiction,” state Atty. Gen. Xavier Becerra said at a news conference in Los Angeles. “Juul adopted the tobacco industry’s infamous playbook, employing advertisements that had no regard for public health and searching out vulnerable targets.”

Amid backlash from the public, Juul recently announced it would stop selling some flavored electronic cigarettes, including mint. A government report recently said Juul was the most popular brand among high school students.

“These results are unacceptable,” Juul Chief Executive K.C. Crosthwaite said in a statement last week, adding that the company must “earn the trust of society.”

Los Angeles County Dist. Atty. Jackie Lacey said Monday that Juul’s decision to stop selling some flavored vaping products has come “too late,” noting that many teens are already caught up in using e-cigarettes.

State officials said the percentage of high school students who have vaped has increased from 11.7% in 2017 to 27.5% this year.

“Unfortunately tobacco and nicotine use is on the rise among young people, driven largely by vaping products,” Lacey said at the news conference on Monday.

Juul spokesman Austin Finan said Monday that the firm has not yet reviewed the complaint.

“We remain focused on resetting the vapor category in the U.S. and earning the trust of society by working cooperatively with attorneys general, regulators, public health officials, and other stakeholders to combat underage use and convert adult smokers from combustible cigarettes,” he said.

Finan said that Juul has suspended all broadcast, print and digital product advertising in the U.S. and is “expanding our commitment to develop new technology to reduce youth use. Our customer base is the world’s 1 billion adult smokers and we do not intend to attract underage users.”

Juul holds about 60% of the market for electronic cigarettes, state officials said.

The lawsuit comes amid a national health emergency in which 42 people, including four Californians, have died of lung illness after vaping.

The lawsuit filed in Alameda County Superior Court, which also names San Francisco-based Pax Labs Inc., seeks civil penalties and a permanent injunction against use of “deceptive” practices by the firms.

Becerra said the legal action is a result of a 21-month investigation with Lacey’s office that found improper activity and marketing. The legal brief quotes emails and other comments from vaping firm employees who talked about efforts to use social media to make vaping “cool.”

Samples were handed out at street festivals, a Cinespia outdoor movie screening event and concerts in Los Angeles, the lawsuit alleged.

State officials also allege that Juul Labs Inc. failed to include required warnings about exposure to chemicals linked to cancer, birth defects and other potential reproductive harm.

The suit also alleges Juul delivered products to underage people, failed to verify the age of buyers and violated privacy rights of minors by sending marketing material to the email addresses of those who failed age verification on the company’s website.

“Despite now claiming that its mission is to help ‘adult smokers,’ starting with its launch, [Juul] has engaged in a systematic campaign to target underage California residents,” the lawsuit alleges. Juul’s “campaign has been wildly successful, with millions of teens and young adults using their product. While [Juul’s] profits soared, users became addicted and their health was harmed.”