

HALTON CALLS FOR CRACK DOWN ON VAPING RETAILERS

MELANIE HENNESSEY
mhennessey@metroland.com

With cases of vaping-related illness and death starting to emerge, Halton Region is urging the province to beef up regulations that govern vape products.

During its Oct. 16 meeting, regional council passed a motion that calls on the minister of health to immediately remove exemptions in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act so that retailers of vape products will be prohibited from promoting their merchandise, subjecting them to the same restrictions as tobacco products.

The motion goes on to request that vape product retailers with one registered sales conviction be subject to Smoke-Free Ontario's automatic prohibition clause, meaning they would be banned from selling or storing vaping prod-

ucts on-site for a prescribed time period.

Currently these retailers are subject to monetary fines only, while tobacco retailers with a history of non-compliance face automatic prohibition after two registered sales convictions.

In a report to council, Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hamidah Meghani detailed alarming statistics about vaping and its impact on health.

By the end of last month, the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention had 805 confirmed or probable cases of severe pulmonary disease linked to vaping and 12 deaths.

In Canada, one confirmed case has been reported in Quebec, and one possible case is under investigation in Middlesex-London.

"All reported cases of



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vaping-related severe pulmonary disease have a history of vaping cannabis, nicotine or both in the 90 days prior to illness," said Meghani, noting the majority of cases described were among youth and young adults. "The investigation to date has not identified any specific vapour product or substance that is

linked to all cases."

With vape products currently exempt from promotion restrictions in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, the products are widely marketed on the internet and at convenience stores, gas stations and grocery stores.

"Evidence shows that youth who are exposed to

vapour product advertising through various channels are significantly more likely to use the products," added Meghani.

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Halton's public health inspectors enforce the age restrictions for tobacco and vape products and regularly conduct unannounced youth access checks at local businesses.

Meghani said they use a "progressive" enforcement approach that includes the use of education, warnings and graduated charging options to reflect the frequency and severity of the level of non-compliance.

While she had recommended the province be asked to implement an automatic prohibition clause

for vaping product retailers with two registered sales convictions - putting them on par with tobacco retailers - Oakville Councillor Tom Adams said he'd rather see a "one strike and you're out" system.

He put forth a motion amendment to that effect, which was supported by his council colleagues.

Locally, municipalities are starting to examine what they can do to crack down on vaping issues. Oakville Coun. Jeff Knoll said a town bylaw, with regulations around licensing for businesses that sell vaping products, is expected in the new year, while Burlington Coun. Lisa Kearns said the city's council will be looking into what can be done to prohibit advertising of vaping products, particularly around schools.

A letter from regional chair Gary Carr detailing Halton's requests on the matter will now be sent to the minister of health and also circulated to all Halton MPPs.

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