



Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.dhhs.vic.gov.au
DX 210081

BAC-3901
COR 2018 002773



Hayley Philpot
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Ms Philpot

I am writing in response to your letter dated 16 July 2019 (reissued on 6 September 2019) relating to Coroner Phillip Byrne's recommendation to the Department of Health and Human Services in his finding into the death of Baby J.

The Department's response to Coroner Byrne's recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation:

That the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services conduct a public awareness campaign in relation to liquid nicotine per se, not the broad issues surrounding e-cigarettes, and nicotine free liquids utilised in vaping.

Department's response:

The department acknowledges that the Victorian Government plays a pivotal role in educating the general public about the dangers of liquid nicotine and e-liquid products.

The Coroner's recommendation specifies that the public awareness campaign should focus on liquid nicotine. However, e-liquids labelled nicotine-free can also contain nicotine and other dangerous chemicals. The department considers it important to ensure that safety messages encompass all e-cigarettes and related products.

As acknowledged by the Coroner in his finding, the department has been working with Safer Care Victoria to disseminate messages that inform the wider Victorian community of the risks associated with the use of e-cigarettes around children and remind health professionals to contact the Victorian Poisons Information Centre if they are concerned that anyone has ingested liquid from e-cigarettes.

In March 2019, the department collaborated with Safer Care Victoria to develop a communications plan in response to the death of Baby J. Safety messages and factsheets were distributed via multiple channels. This included websites, such as the Better Health Channel, health.vic.gov.au, Quit Victoria, the Victorian Poisons information Centre, plus various newsletters and emails to the community and health sector, including Safer Care enews, and social media posts.

Minister Jenny Mikakos issued a media release on 8 March 2019 highlighting that liquid nicotine is poisonous and can cause serious illness, or even death if ingested, with children and pets being particularly vulnerable.

Since the release of the Coroner's finding on 16 July 2019, the department has extended and expanded the existing communications plan and is developing new materials for promoting awareness around the dangers of e-liquids.

Further activity is being planned for the end of 2019. For example, a video informing the public of the dangers of using e-liquids around children is under development and will be disseminated via social media. The department is also collaborating with Kidsafe to identify further opportunities for the distribution of messaging.

Key messages include:

- informing the general public that nicotine is a poisonous substance that can cause both serious illness and death, especially in children
- that even products labelled as nicotine free may contain nicotine or other dangerous substances and chemicals
- that e-liquid products may not be accurately labelled or packaged safely with child-resistant caps and could easily be opened by children
- ensuring e-liquid products are locked away in secure cupboards where children cannot see or reach them
- being aware that children are attracted to the different flavourings and colourings that e-liquids are available in.

I hope this information satisfies the Coroner's recommendation in relation to this matter. If you require further information, please contact Melissa Boag, Manager, Tobacco Control on (03) 9096 5025 or email melissa.boag@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely


Kym Peake
Secretary

14/10/2019