

Cannabis users 'have lungs of 80-year-olds': Doctors warn people are turning up at A&E with new form of emphysema after using drug for less than ten years

- **Many, who are just in their 30s, are in need of long-term oxygen therapy**
- **One patient in Bangor, north Wales, is now awaiting a lung transplant**
- **Cannabis-tobacco mix damaging because often smoked without filter**
- **Emphysema normally caused by tobacco and usually occurs late in life**

By Fiona Macrae

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Cannabis smokers in their 30s have lungs so badly damaged that they look like an 80 year old's, doctors have warned.

They say that young adults who have smoked cannabis for less than a decade are turning up at A&E with a severe, rapid and advanced form of the lung disease emphysema.

Some are in their 30s and in some cases their lungs are so badly damaged that they are put on long-term oxygen therapy.

One patient, studied in Ysbyty Gwynedd, a hospital in Bangor, north Wales, is waiting for a lung transplant, a British Thoracic Society conference heard.

Emphysema, in which the millions of tiny air sacs in the lungs are gradually damaged, is normally caused by tobacco and usually occurs late in life.

It is thought the cannabis-tobacco mixture found in joints is more damaging because they are often smoked without a filter. Cannabis smokers also tend to inhale for longer and much of the cannabis on sale today is much stronger than in the past.

Dr Damian Mckeon, a consultant in respiratory medicine at Ysbyty Gwynedd, who studied eight patients who had smoked at least five joints a day, said: 'We

are seeing young people on the wards with the lungs of 80 year olds after less than a decade of smoking cannabis and tobacco.

‘Our study was in a rural region of North Wales but we believe these cases may represent the tip of the iceberg.

‘Cannabis is far stronger these days and we are seeing the emergence of a new severe form of emphysema – which could lead to people struggling for breath for the rest of their life.

‘We urgently need a detailed study across the UK which analyses the national picture of cannabis-use and lung disease.’

Dr Bernard Higgins, of the British Thoracic Society, said: ‘This study is yet another small but persuasive piece of a jigsaw pointing to a real danger of regularly smoking joints.

‘The Government should monitor this emerging evidence carefully and take it into account when considering future drugs and smoking policy.’