

Smoking and COVID-19

Evidence shows that smokers are more at risk from lung infections including bacterial pneumonia and viral infections like the common cold and the flu.¹ Smoking also causes serious cardiovascular conditions and weakens the immune system.² The new coronavirus primarily attacks the respiratory system, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has advised that people with chronic lung diseases, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and smokers are more likely to become seriously ill if they contract COVID-19.^{3,4}

Tobacco use is a deadly habit responsible for 8 million deaths each year.⁵ Harmful to those who smoke and to those around them, smoking is of particular concern during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

Evidence

Although robust direct evidence on the association between smoking and severe COVID-19 is lacking, smokers are known to be at higher risk of other respiratory infections and there is an association between smoking and comorbidities that increase the risk of severe COVID-19. In addition, it is not only the inhalation of toxic chemicals in cigarettes that put smokers at risk. The World Health Organization (WHO) has advised that the physical hand-to-mouth movements associated with smoking can make smokers more vulnerable to COVID-19.⁶ Since people who use e-cigarettes use the same hand-to-mouth motions, and given emerging evidence that vaping can harm lung function,⁷ the use of e-cigarettes is also considered a risky behavior.

Sharing water pipes has also been implicated in outbreaks of respiratory diseases.⁸ WHO now recommends a ban on water pipes in public places and some countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have banned their use to avoid COVID-19 transmission.⁹ People should stop using or sharing water pipes, also known as hookahs or shisha pipes, which put users at increased risk of contracting COVID-19.¹⁰

Recommendations

For Governments:

Governments can help reduce smoking and encourage quitting by enacting and enforcing effective national comprehensive tobacco control laws that comply with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Governments can also prioritize the six components of WHO MPOWER¹¹ guidelines:

- Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
- Protect people from tobacco use
- Offer help to quit tobacco use
- Warn about the dangers of tobacco
- Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- Raise taxes on tobacco.

Governments can also:

- Use this moment to caution smokers that they are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and likely to experience greater morbidity and mortality from the disease.
- Offer smokers immediate help quitting and promote cessation efforts.
- Close tobacco shops. Unlike grocery stores and pharmacies, tobacco shops do not provide an essential service.

For people who smoke:

Smokers should quit smoking today. Within minutes of stopping smoking, your body begins to reverse the damage.¹² A local quit line, local health department web site, Facebook group and other social media channels offer help.

Smokers should respect smoke-free laws, and not smoke indoors or around family members and loved ones. Secondhand smoke can cause lung and heart disease in adults, as well as asthma and infections in children. Secondhand smoke also raises the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, low birth weight and pregnancy complications.¹³

More info at

PreventEpidemics.org
ResolveToSaveLives.org
VitalStrategies.org

- 1 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/217624>
- 2 https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/effects_cig_smoking/index.html
- 3 <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=1>
- 4 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>
- 5 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>
- 6 <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/q-a-on-smoking-and-covid-19>
- 7 <https://www.bmjjournals.com/content/366/bmji5275>
- 8 <https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/waterpipes/covid-19/>
- 9 <http://www.emro.who.int/tfi/know-the-truth/tobacco-and-waterpipe-users-are-at-increased-risk-of-covid-19-infection.html>
- 10 <https://www.who.int/tobacco-control/cpr/kh/waterpipes/covid-19/>
- 11 <https://www.who.int/tobacco/mPOWER/publications/eer/>
- 12 https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/benefits/
- 13 https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/health_effects/pregnancy/index.htm