

Smoking and coronavirus

Why it matters and what you need to know

Smokefree
Councillor
Network

- » People who smoke and contract COVID-19 are more likely to develop severe respiratory problems
- » People who smoke should be encouraged to quit and protect others from exposure
- » Local authorities have a key role to play in communicating the risks and providing stop smoking support

What does smoking have to do with coronavirus?

“It is abundantly clear that smoking makes the impact of coronavirus worse”

Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, [17th March 2020](#)

Continuing to deliver support for people who smoke to quit, and keep their homes smokefree, is a vital part of our response to coronavirus (COVID-19). This is because smoking damages the lungs, airways and immune system thereby reducing the body’s natural protection against infections and particularly respiratory infections such as COVID-19. This means that, if you smoke or are exposed to tobacco smoke:

- You have an increased risk of getting acute respiratory infections;
- You have a greater risk of the infection lasting longer;
- You have a greater risk of the infection being more serious than it would be for someone who does not smoke.

Early evidence from China has found that smokers with COVID-19 are [14 times more likely](#) to develop severe symptoms of the disease.

Why it’s important to help people who smoke to quit now

For anyone who smokes, quitting will always be the best thing they can do to improve their health. However, COVID-19 presents particular risks and opportunities. The [majority of smokers want to quit](#), and future and immediate health concerns are [the leading triggers for making a quit attempt](#). With everyone, including smokers, concerned about health and looking for ways to reduce their risk from COVID-19, local authorities should ensure they are providing support for smokers to quit.

Quitting smoking delivers immediate benefits which reduce a person’s risk from infections, particularly respiratory infections: by [improving functions vital to immune health](#).

- After 8 hours, carbon monoxide levels in blood reduce by more than half and oxygen levels return to normal, vital for the transport of infection-fighting white blood cells around the body;
- After 48 hours, carbon monoxide is eliminated from the body, further improving circulation and the lungs begin to clear of smoking debris, making it easier for them to expel foreign bodies;
- After 72 hours, bronchial tubes in the lungs relax, making breathing easier, improving lung capacity.

Further, with many people spending much more time at home, helping smokers quit also protects the health of cohabitants, particularly children and pregnant women. [There’s no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke \(SHS\)](#), which is a risk factor for miscarriage, stillbirth and sudden infant death; respiratory disease as well as triggering heart attacks in those with Coronary Heart Disease. Smokers unable to quit should be encouraged to protect those around them from SHS by only smoking outdoors. Alternatives like nicotine patches, spray and gum, or e-cigarettes, can be used indoors to relieve nicotine cravings.

“To be clear on smokers, my recommendation is that they stop smoking, if you’re going to give up smoking, this is a very good moment to do it.”

Prof Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer, 5th March 2020

What should local areas be doing around smoking and COVID-19?

Stop smoking services and support

Social distancing measures have required all face-to-face stop smoking service appointments to cease. Local authorities are recommended to provide behavioural advice and support to be provided via telephone or, where possible, remote systems which allow for video calls (maintaining an element of face-to-face contact). It has also been recommended that services cease CO monitoring, including for pregnant women, to reduce risks of transmission. Mobile and digital apps can also be helpful, information on these is available via the Today is the Day website.

Smokers trying to quit need to be able to continue to receive stop smoking medications from services, this may require adaptations to enable posting medication or introducing a voucher scheme.

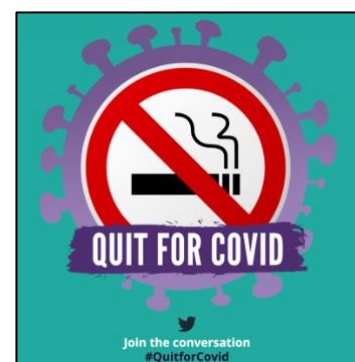
More information:

- National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT): [Protecting smokers from COVID-19](#)
- NHS England: [COVID-19 and CO monitoring in pregnancy](#)
- Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group: [Adaptable smoking in pregnancy and COVID-19 poster](#)
- Direct your community to the TodayistheDay.co.uk website where there is access to support and encouragement to quit

Communications

Local authorities should be communicating the risks relating to smoking and COVID-19; the benefits of quitting and how to access support; the risks of exposure to SHS and the importance of maintaining a smokefree home.

ASH and partners are promoting [#QuitForCovid](#). Resources for local authorities to use to support their own communications around smoking and COVID-19 are available on the TodayistheDay.co.uk website.



#QuitForCovid logo as featured on todayistheday.co.uk

E-cigarettes

Vaping is far less harmful to the respiratory system than smoking. People using e-cigarettes to quit smoking should not be discouraged from continuing to do so at this time. Further, smokers should still be encouraged to try e-cigarettes as a quitting aid to improve their health and reduce their risk from respiratory infections. Just like everyone, people who vape must be encouraged to stick to the social distancing rules, and should be discouraged from breathing vapour towards other people in their vicinity.

More information:

- ASH: [Briefing - Electronic Cigarettes](#)

If you have any questions, or would like further information on any of the above, don't hesitate to get in touch by emailing:

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action on smoking and health