

# COVID-19 and Smoking

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On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic affecting around 200 countries. It has caused economies to enter recession, healthcare systems to fail, and social life to diminish. It has stopped the fast pace life of people like never before.

After the COVID-19 virus outbreak, the counter for increasing cases has not stopped and many studies are taking place to know more about it. Now, studies about the risk factors associated with COVID-19virus started to emerge including its relation with smoking in all its forms including cigarette smoking, waterpipe smoking and vaping.

As the international recommendations have cautioned the elderly and people with chronic medical conditions as vulnerable groups, the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has added smokers to be at a higher risk of getting infected with the COVID-19virus.

As the World Health Organization explains, tobacco is harmful to the entire body specifically to the respiratory and cardiovascular systems. Although there has been limited studies exploring the association between smoking and COVID-19virus, experts are asserting that smoking is a risk factor for COVID-19virus. Knowing that this virus attacks the lungs, and given that smoking suppresses the functioning of the immune system, it seems prudent that patients will encounter more serious adverse effects, if ever, they are smokers.

The World Health Organization included waterpipe as a tobacco product to the list of risk factors associated with the novel virus. The waterpipe apparatus provides a promoting environment for the survival and transmission of microorganisms among smokers. Additionally, Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse has also mentioned vaping to be a risk factor resulting in similar damages.



Recent reports are showing that percentages of infected people with COVID-19virus are higher for men than that for women. In a study done in China, the analysis shows that 2.8% of the death cases were men in comparison to 1.7% for women. Experts are attributing this gender difference increase in death rate to be associated with smoking, knowing that more than half of the Chinese men are smokers in comparison to less than 3% of female smokers. This smoking hypothesis was backed up by a Chinese study conducted on a sample of 1099 patients affected with COVID-19virus from multiple regions of mainland China where 16.9% of cases with severe symptoms were smokers in comparison to 11.8% of current smokers in non-severe cases. This phenomenon was also identified in Italy, Spain and the USA, supporting this observation.

In response to this pandemic, several precautions have been publicized to ensure everyone's safety including practicing the correct hand hygiene and maintaining social distancing. However, **quitting all types of tobacco smoking and avoiding second hand smoking should be highlighted and enforced as an additional preventive measure.** This could be the best time for the smokers to quit and for the community to strengthen smoke free laws as a shield against COVID-19virus!

## NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (2019-nCoV)

### What is a 2019 Novel coronavirus?

It is a new strain of coronavirus that has been recently identified in humans. It was first identified in China.

### What is the Incubation period of the virus?

The virus can be transmitted before onset of symptoms with an incubation period between 2 and 14 days.

### What are the symptoms of the virus?

The respiratory symptoms:

fever, shortness of breath and

breathing difficulties are the most common.

In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia.

### What is the mode of transmission?

The virus can be transmitted from person to person usually after close contact with an infected patient or his respiratory secretions.

### Is there a treatment or a vaccine?

At present, there is no specific treatment or vaccine. Most patients can gradually and spontaneously recover.

### How to protect yourself from the virus?

- Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or antiseptics
- Avoid close contact with anyone coughing or sneezing
- Report to your doctor if you develop respiratory symptoms within a period of 14 days from returning from China or if you have contact with confirmed case

### What measures should you take in case you are suspected or confirmed to have the disease?

- Stay and sleep in a separate well ventilated room
- Do not share items such as towels with others
- Use tissues to cover mouth and nose when coughing and discard immediately
- Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or antiseptics
- Wear a surgical mask to avoid transmitting infection to others
- Frequently clean and disinfect your surrounding environment
- Report to your doctor if your symptoms are worsening

