

SMOKING, VAPING, AND COVID-19 Q & A

Q. Are people who smoke or vape at a greater risk of exposure to COVID-19?

A. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus which spreads through saliva or the droplets produced when an infected person sneezes or coughs near other people or onto frequently touched surfaces. Smoking and vaping requires frequent hand to mouth contact which means people who use these products may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 exposure. Sharing these products also increases the chance of spreading the virus. Not sharing these products and washing your hands frequently is key to stopping the spread of COVID-19. See [Hand Hygiene](#) for hand washing tips.

Q. Are people who smoke or vape at a greater risk of getting COVID-19?

A. Smoking is known to decrease the body's immunity making people who smoke more susceptible to lung and chest infections. As a result, it is likely that people who smoke are at a higher risk for getting COVID-19 compared to someone who does not smoke. Although not as much is known about the effects of vaping, preliminary research does support that the damage done by vaping is similar to that of smoking and therefore it is possible that vaping could increase the risk of developing COVID-19.^{1,2}

Q. Are people who smoke or vape more likely to have complications if they do get COVID-19?

A. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that causes lung illness with mild to severe symptoms. Pre-existing lung disease or reduced lung capacity may greatly increase the severity of illness experienced. As a result, activities that reduce the ability of the body to use oxygen properly, like smoking and vaping, could put users at higher risk of complications from COVID-19.¹ The best thing someone can do to reduce their risk is quit.

Q. Are people who breathe in secondhand cigarette smoke more vulnerable to COVID-19?

A. Being exposed to secondhand smoke has always been dangerous. Just like smoking, secondhand smoke lowers immunity, lung function, and affects cardiovascular health. As a result, it is likely that people who breathe in secondhand smoke will be more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and are at an increased risk of developing serious complications from the virus.^{3,4}

Q. Can people get COVID-19 from breathing in secondhand vapour from an electronic cigarette?

A. Research has only begun to study the effects of secondhand vapour and its effects on health so not enough is known to confirm whether COVID-19 can travel in exhaled vapour and infect another person. Based on what is known, exhaled vapour does not travel far so even if COVID-19 was present, the spread into the environment would be far less compared to that of coughing or sneezing.^{5,6}

Q. Where can I get support to quit?

A. Quitting smoking and breaking the addiction to tobacco industry products isn't easy but it's the best thing you can do to protect your health. Visit [DontQuitQuitting.ca](#), or [SmokersHelpline.ca](#), or [SimcoeMuskokaHealth.org/Topics/Tobacco/Quitting](#) for tips and online support with your quit attempt.

During these uncertain times, it is understandable that people may be feeling increased levels of stress and anxiety. Turning to substances is not a healthy or productive way to deal with these feelings. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is offering an online peer to peer support group where people can share encouragement and talk about their experiences with managing stress and anxiety related to the COVID-19 virus. For more information visit [CAMH COVID-19 Discussion Forum](#) or contact covidmoderator@camh.ca.⁷

SMOKING, VAPING, AND COVID-19 Q & A

References

1. Tanya Lewis. Smoking or Vaping May Increase the Risk of Severe Coronavirus Infection. Scientific American. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/smoking-or-vaping-may-increase-the-risk-of-a-severe-coronavirus-infection1/>. Published March 17, 2020. Accessed March 30, 2020.
2. The Ontario Tobacco Research Unit. Are Smokers and Vapers at Higher Risk of COVID-19 Infection? https://www.otru.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/otru_covidfaqs_mar2020.pdf. Published March 30, 2020. Accessed April 2, 2020.
3. UC Merced. COVID-19 More likely to impact smokers and people exposed to secondhand smoke, report finds. University of California. <https://news.ucmerced.edu/news/2020/covid-19-more-likely-impact-smokers-and-people-exposed-secondhand-smoke-report-finds>. Published April 2, 2020. Accessed April 2, 2020.
4. Action on Smoking and Health. Health Secretary: “it is abundantly clear that smoking makes the impact of a coronavirus worse”. Action on Smoking and Health. <https://ash.org.uk/media-and-news/press-releases-media-and-news/health-secretary-it-is-abundantly-clear-that-smoking-makes-the-impact-of-a-coronavirus-worse/>. Published March 18, 2020. Accessed March 30, 2020.
5. Sussman, R. and Escrig, C., 2020. Vaping & COVID-19 – Information For Vapers. [online] Consumer Advocates for Smoke-free Alternatives Assoc. <http://www.casaa.org/news/vaping-covid-19/>. Accessed March 27, 2020.
6. The International Society of Substance Use Professionals. Supporting People who Smoke or Vape During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.issup.net/events/calendar/2020-04/supporting-people-who-smoke-or-vape-during-covid-19-pandemic-0>. Published April 3, 2020. Accessed April 7, 2020.
7. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Talking to children about COVID-19 and its impact. https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/camh_covid19_infosheet-talking_to_kids-pdf.pdf. Published March 31, 2020. Accessed April 2, 2020.