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| Smoking and e-cigarette use |
| Coronavirus (COVID-19) |

People who smoke are generally at higher risk of respiratory tract infections, like lung and chest infections. There is also evidence to suggest that e-cigarette use (or ‘vaping’) leads to a higher risk of respiratory tract infections.

It’s not clear how long a person needs to stop smoking to reduce their risk from infection, however lungs start to recover quickly after stopping smoking.

Stopping smoking has many health benefits, even beyond a link with coronavirus (COVID-19), so it’s always a good time to quit. During this pandemic and as we head into the annual influenza season, quitting has never been more important.

## Are people who smoke or vape at more risk of coronavirus infection?

It’s more likely than not that people who smoke or vape have a higher risk of getting coronavirus (COVID-19), compared to people who don’t smoke or vape. This is based on the knowledge that people who smoke or vape are at a higher risk of getting many other lung and chest infections.

Also, the hand-to-mouth action of smoking and vaping means that people who smoke or vape may be more vulnerable to infection, as they are touching their face and mouth more often.

In addition, sharing any type of tobacco product: cigarettes, e-cigarettes or shisha/waterpipes, can increase the risk of spreading coronavirus.

There is a small risk that the aerosol coming from an e-cigarette device can also spread coronavirus if the aerosol is inhaled or if it settles on a surface that someone subsequently touches.

## Are people who smoke or vape more likely to have severe complications if they get coronavirus (COVID-19)?

There is growing evidence that people who smoke are likely to be more severely impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19). This is because smoking damages the lungs so that they don’t work as well. For example, lungs naturally produce mucus, but people who smoke have more and thicker mucus that is hard to clean out of the lungs. This mucus clogs the lungs and is prone to becoming infected.

Smoking and vaping both affect the immune system, which might make it harder to fight infection.

Vaping has been shown to increase inflammation in the lungs and to increase coughing and wheezing.

## What if I smoke or vape? What should I do?

The best thing you can do is quit. Your GP, Quitline counsellors and nicotine replacement therapy or stop-smoking medications can help you quit.

Don’t share cigarettes or roll a cigarette for someone else.

Don’t share vaping devices. Also, don’t use any device near others or in an enclosed space to avoid other people inhaling the aerosol or touching a surface on which the aerosol might have settled.

Pay extra attention to advice already received: wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, cough into your elbow, try to avoid touching your face, and maintain physical distance from others.

Get your flu shot.

## What if I previously smoked? Am I still at more risk of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

It’s not currently known if people who have previously smoked have a higher risk of getting coronavirus (COVID-19) compared to people who have never smoked.

If you previously smoked and have now quit, you’ll almost certainly have a lower risk of severe complications from the coronavirus (COVID-19) (if you become infected with the virus) than you would have if you were still smoking.

## How long do people have to stop smoking or vaping to reduce coronavirus (COVID-19) risks?

This is not currently known for coronavirus (COVID-19) specifically, but it’s well-understood that stopping smoking improves lung health within a few weeks. Rates of lung infections like bronchitis and pneumonia also decrease, which is particularly important as Victoria heads into influenza season.

## Is it still safe to start, or continue to use, nicotine replacement therapy and other stop-smoking medications?

For people who smoke, stop-smoking medications or nicotine replacement therapy products (like patches, gum, lozenge or spray) can help to reduce cravings and manage withdrawal symptoms. When combined with tailored support from Quitline, these medications give people the best chance of successfully quitting.

There is no evidence that coronavirus (COVID-19) has an impact on the safety and effectiveness of these medications. If you are already using these medications, it is safe to continue to do so, as instructed by your doctor. If you are thinking about starting these medications, it is best to first speak with a Quitline counsellor (13 7848) or your doctor.

## How can I tell the difference between nicotine withdrawal symptoms and coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms?

People who have recently stopped smoking may experience nicotine withdrawal symptoms, which can include cravings, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. These symptoms are usually temporary and disappear after about two to four weeks.

Less common symptoms of nicotine withdrawal might include a cough and sore throat, which are usually temporary. These withdrawal symptoms may be confused with the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). Fever is not a symptom of nicotine withdrawal.

It’s best to speak to your GP if you are worried you may have coronavirus (COVID-19).

For more information about common nicotine withdrawal symptoms visit: <https://www.quit.org.au/articles/what-is-nicotine-withdrawal/>

You can also read more about the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

## Where can I get the best support to stop smoking and vaping?

The best way to stop smoking is to use a tailored quit counselling service such as Quitline (call 13 7848), plus stop-smoking medications or nicotine replacement therapy products such as patches and gum, lozenge or mouth-spray.

Talk to your GP for information on stop-smoking medications and nicotine replacement therapy products. Your GP can give you a prescription for subsidised patches, which you can use along with gum, lozenge or spray. Your GP can tell you which is best for you.

Quitline counsellors are available Monday to Friday 8:00am – 8:00pm and provide personalised, non-judgmental and empathetic support to help you quit, including information on the types of stop-smoking medications available. Quitline counselling is free.

Quitline is an inclusive and culturally safe space for all, including the [LGBTIQA+ community](https://www.quit.org.au/articles/lgbtiq/). An interpreter service is available for people who speak a language other than English.

There is also an Aboriginal Quitline for people who smoke and identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Simply call 13 7848 and ask to speak with one of their qualified Aboriginal Quitline counsellors.

Go to [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au) for information, tips and tools to help you wherever you are along your quitting journey, and remember you need to work on your habits and triggers for smoking or vaping, as well as your addiction to nicotine.

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