

# What NHS says about coronavirus risk to people who smoke and vape

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Experts have warned against smoking and vaping in light of the continued spread of coronavirus  
(Image: PA/PA Wire)

Public Health Wales has revealed that smokers - and their families - are at "increased risk" of catching Covid-19.

The admission comes as the coronavirus continues to pose challenges for health officials and governments across the world - with over a million confirmed cases of the virus globally.

It was first identified in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019 and has since reached over 180 countries, including the UK.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson last month announced preventative measures against the virus, introducing social distancing - essentially placing the country on lockdown for the foreseeable future.

Those with underlying health conditions, in particular, have been urged to shield themselves because their weakened immune systems make them more susceptible to catching the virus - and more adverse subsequent health issues.

There's been evidence to suggest that smokers and vapers are also at an increased risk of development, so North Wales Live investigated the issue to find out more.

## **Does smoking increase the risk of coronavirus?**

Cigarette usage has been linked with increased risk of catching coronavirus - and then experiencing subsequent health issues (Image: Getty Images)

Concerns have been raised over the risk posed to smokers since the coronavirus was first identified in the UK earlier this year.

Most recently, Keir Lewis, Professor of Respiratory Medicine at Swansea University, warned that many smokers are at greater risk because they likely already have pre-existing lung conditions, such as asthma or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

As revealed by ITV News, Professor Lewis explained that as well as the increased risk, smokers are also more likely to experience further health issues as a result of contracting coronavirus.

He explained: "It looks like if you have a respiratory condition then you are more likely to develop viral pneumonia from Covid-19.

"However, because of the effects of smoking on the immune responses and your body's natural defences it's likely that smokers are going to be more at risk independently of whether they have other lung or other medical conditions."

Professor Lewis however stated that lung defences can in fact begin to heal within days - so even giving up smoking now could significantly improve a smoker's ability to defend and recover from such infection.

Preliminary research on coronavirus appears to support his claims, with a recent academic journal documenting the effect of smoking on confirmed cases in China.

The study, published in New England Journal of Medicine, found that current smokers account for 26 per cent of patients who ended up in intensive care or died of the virus.

This is perhaps surprisingly as elderly individuals have become most synonymous, within coronavirus discussion, with treatment in intensive care units.

### **Does vaping increase the risk of coronavirus?**



Some experts claim there's evidence to suggest vapers should be concerned about coronavirus  
(Image: PA)

Some researchers have similarly warned against the potential risks associated with vaping, in connection to coronavirus, as well.

As reported by [the Mirror](#), some experts suggest that vaping suppresses immune function in the lungs - though this has not yet been evidenced by studies specifically on coronavirus.

Additionally, scientific advisor Tom McLean has recently claimed that "respiratory droplets" contained in clouds created by vape products could actually be spreading the virus.

Speaking to the Glasgow Times, he said: "Blowing vapour out is as good as someone spitting in your face.

"The vapour itself contains respiratory droplets including saliva, mucus and bacteria and when it's blown out, it travels for a long distance and hangs in the air at head height."

Mr McLean, chief scientific advisor to The Nanotera Group, also claimed there was evidence that vaping causes a weakened immune system.

### **What has the NHS said?**

Health officials generally warn against the risks of smoking and vaping (Image: Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire)

North Wales Live asked Public Health Wales, an NHS body, whether smokers and vapers were at increased risk.

A spokesperson revealed that smoking not only puts the individual at "greater risk of developing severe disease" from Covid-19, but also puts those exposed to the second hand smoke at increased risk - including children.

It's been noted that the repetitive hand-to-mouth movement involved in smoking is an "easy route of entry for the virus" - which puts smokers at greater risk of contracting it.

The spokesperson added: "The evidence clearly shows the Covid-19 virus attacks the respiratory system, which explains why smokers are at greater risk.

"A small but highly impactful survey from China finds that smokers with COVID-19 are 14 times more likely to develop severe disease."

Ashley Gould, Consultant in Public Health and Lead for Tobacco Control at Public Health Wales, explained: "In light of this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, there has never been a more important time to stop smoking.

"Not only for your own health but to protect those around you."

We were also told that this will further help "alleviate the huge pressures on the NHS."

Anyone who wishes to stop smoking is encouraged to get NHS expert stop smoking advice and support - by phoning 0800 085 2219 or through online Help Me Quit services.

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