

Coronavirus risks send out yet another reminder to smokers: quit now

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I have argued before about the dangers posed by Covid-19 to smokers, and a huge amount of data now confirms my view – bodies like the World Health Organisation, the World Bank, health organisations and national ministers of health are unanimous in recognising the link and the risk.

Current statistics show that smokers are more likely to get Covid-19, and in particular are more likely to become seriously ill, thereby increasing the chances of death.

There are several reasons why Covid-19 is particularly harmful to smokers:

- Smokers may already have chronic lung disease, placing them in the “vulnerable” group, which would greatly increase the risk of serious illness.
- Many smokers already have damaged lungs, which reduces the organs’ ability to fight off the coronavirus that causes Covid-19.
- Smoking also affects the immune response.
- The act of smoking means that fingers (and possibly contaminated cigarettes or delivery systems for new tobacco products) are in contact with lips, which increases the possibility of transmission of the virus from hand to mouth.
- Smokers usually take off or adjust their masks to smoke, another opportunity for virus transfer.
- Smoking products such as water pipes often involve the sharing of mouth pieces and hoses, which could facilitate the transmission of Covid-19 in communal and social settings.
- The virus is breathed out, so it is also possible that the clouds of smoke and vape emitted by the smoker would spread the virus, as these may be forcibly exhaled and therefore travel further than a quiet breath behind a mask.

If there was ever a moment to quit smoking for the immediate and long-term future, it is now.

Prof Dr Judith Mackay, director, Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control

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