



FAQs – Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Smoking

We answer commonly asked questions about COVID-19 and smoking.

People who smoke are generally at higher risk of respiratory tract infections, like lung and chest infections, and there is growing evidence that people who smoke may be at higher risk of COVID-19 and its complications. People with poor lung health and other conditions like cardiovascular disease and cancer (which can be caused by smoking) may also be at higher risk of complications if they do become infected with the virus. It's not clear how long a person needs to stop smoking to reduce their risk of these complications. It's important to remember stopping smoking has many health benefits, even beyond a link with COVID-19, so it's always a good time to quit. Quitline continues to be available to offer support.

Q. Are people who smoke at more risk of COVID-19?

While it's not certain that people who smoke are more likely to get COVID-19, we know that they are at a higher risk of getting lung and chest infections in general. This means that it's more likely than not that people who smoke have a higher risk of getting COVID-19 compared to people who don't smoke.

Also, the hand-to-mouth action of smoking and e-cigarette use means that people who smoke may be more vulnerable to COVID-19, as they are touching their face and mouth more often.

Sharing any type of tobacco or smoking product (for example, cigarettes, e-cigarettes or shisha/waterpipes) can also increase the risk of spreading COVID-19.

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

There is growing evidence to suggest that people who smoke are likely to be more severely impacted by COVID-19, 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 also affects the immune system, making it harder to fight infection.

There is also evidence that people with other health conditions like cardiovascular disease and cancer are more likely to experience severe complications of COVID-19. Smoking increases the risk of many of these conditions.

Q. What if I previously smoked? Am I still at more risk of COVID-19?

It's not currently known if people who have previously smoked have a higher risk of getting COVID-19 compared to people who have never smoked. People who smoke are at increased risk of lung infections in general, but the lungs do heal relatively rapidly when people stop smoking. It's not yet known how long is long enough to reduce the risk to the same as someone who has never smoked.

If you previously smoked and are now quit, it's likely you'll have a lower risk of severe complications (if you were infected with the virus) than you would have if you were still smoking.

Q. For how long do people have to stop smoking to reduce their risk of COVID-19 and possible complications?

This is not currently known for COVID-19 specifically, but it's well-understood that stopping smoking improves lung health within a few months. Rates of lung infections like bronchitis and pneumonia also decrease.

Q. 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 like nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) 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 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.

Q. How can I tell the difference between nicotine withdrawal symptoms and 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 2 to 4 weeks.

Less common symptoms of nicotine withdrawal might include a cough and sore throat, which are usually also temporary. These withdrawal symptoms may be confused with the symptoms of COVID-19. It's important to remember that fever isn't a symptom of nicotine withdrawal.

It's best to speak to your doctor if you are worried you may have COVID-19.

For more information about common nicotine withdrawal symptoms, visit:

<https://www.quit.org.au/articles/what-is-nicotine-withdrawal/> (<https://www.quit.org.au/articles/what-is-nicotine-withdrawal/>).

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

Q. Where can I get the best support to stop smoking?

The best thing you can do for your health is to stop smoking. The best way to stop smoking is to use a tailored quit counselling service such as **Quitline 13 7848**, plus stop smoking medications, for instance nicotine patches and gum. Quitline counsellors are available Mon – Friday 8am – 8pm and provide personalised, non-judgmental and empathetic support to help you quit, including information on the types of stop smoking medications available.

Quitline is an inclusive and culturally safe space for all, including the **LGBTIQA+ community** (</articles/lgbtiq/>). There is also an Aboriginal Quitline for people who smoke identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. To access **Aboriginal Quitline**, call **13 7848** and ask to speak with one of our friendly and qualified Aboriginal

Quitline counsellors. We also have an **interpreter service** available if you speak a language other than English. Explore our website at quit.org.au for more info, tips and tools to help you wherever you are along your quitting journey.

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