



November 2020

STEPP Grantee Messages | COVID-19

These messages are developed in partnership with CDPHE for STEPP grantees to communicate about the impact of COVID-19 on people who smoke and vape, people who are trying to quit or stay tobacco-free, and people who live around those who smoke. These messages can be used in materials for local health departments such as press releases, website content, or newsletter copy. Social media post copy is also included at the bottom of this document. While the pandemic has created a sense of urgency, the content should be positive, show the benefits of small steps, demonstrate empathy, and empower those who currently use tobacco to quit.

This is an internal document for STEPP grantees.

Messages by Category

People who smoke or vape face greater risks from COVID-19

- The CDC warns that being a cigarette smoker increases your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.¹
- People who smoke or vape may be at a higher risk from COVID-19 and its complications.²
 - Smoking and vaping impair lung function³, making those who smoke or vape at higher risk of complications from COVID-19⁴.
 - Smoking can cause or worsen many chronic health conditions, including heart diseases linked to poorer COVID-19 outcomes.
 - Smoking suppresses the immune system⁵, making it more likely that COVID-19 will create severe complications.⁶

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

² Source: University of California Merced.

https://ncpc.ucmerced.edu/sites/ncpc.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/ncpc_covid_report3_-_april_2020.pdf

³The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20669512>

⁴ Source: University of California Merced.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

- The hand-to-mouth action of smoking and vaping may make people more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19, as they are touching their face and mouth more often.⁷
- Smokers are at a higher risk of getting lung and chest infections in general, and poor lung health may increase the risk of complications if they become infected with COVID-19.⁸
- It's not clear how long a person needs to stop smoking to reduce their risk of complications from COVID-19. However, the lungs heal relatively rapidly after quitting. Within a few months, lungs are better able to fight infection and respiratory illness.⁹
- If you smoke or vape, consider quitting. Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health. If you used to smoke or vape, don't start again. If you never smoked or vaped, don't start.

The Virus Can Spread Through Smoking/Vaping

- COVID-19 spreads mainly through person-to-person contact but it may be possible to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose, or possibly your eyes. Therefore, smoking and vaping can increase the possibility for the virus to be transmitted from hands to mouth.¹⁰

Support Quitting Tobacco During Stressful Times

- If you smoke or vape and want to make a change, contact the Colorado QuitLine for free support.
- It may be harder to stay quit, especially if you're feeling more stressed, anxious, or lonely because of COVID-19.
- Visit www.coquitline.org or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for free support to help you quit or stay quit. The Colorado QuitLine offers phone and web coaching, motivational text messages, and quit medications like patches and gum.
- If you have used smoking or vaping as a way to connect with others, and are struggling with feeling isolated, the Colorado QuitLine can help. The Colorado QuitLine's free phone and web coaching is available 24/7.
- Quitting is hard - especially during times of stress. The Colorado QuitLine provides free, non-judgmental support.

Importance of Smoke-free Policies

- Emerging research suggests that those who are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke are at higher risk for COVID-19 complications.¹¹
- Smoke-free policies for homes and properties are crucial to protect family members, neighbors, children and the elderly from health effects due to secondhand smoke and vapor exposure.¹²

⁷ Cancer Center Victoria. <https://www.quit.org.au/articles/faqs-coronavirus-covid-19-and-smoking/>

⁸ Source: University of California Merced.

⁹ The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20669512>

¹⁰ Source: World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-smoking-and-covid-19>

¹¹ Source: University of California Merced.

¹² Center for Energy and Environment. (2004). Reduction of Environmental Tobacco Smoke Transfer in Minnesota Multifamily Buildings Using Air Sealing and Ventilation Treatments. Retrieved from

- If you do smoke or vape, consider quitting — for your own health and the health of those around you.
- Property owners of multi-unit housing facilities should implement and continue smoke-free policies to protect residents. Secondhand smoke and vapor can travel quickly through vents and hallways, potentially exposing high-risk individuals to secondhand smoke and its negative effects.¹³

Keep the Health of Others in Mind

- Keep a smoke-free home to protect others. Secondhand smoke worsens lung health for nonsmokers, especially children.¹⁴ If you smoke or vape, be aware of the health of people around you, especially children and older adults.
- Keep a smoke-free policy in your home and car to protect others. Secondhand smoke worsens lung health for nonsmokers¹⁵, especially children and those with weak immune systems¹⁶.
- Children, older adults and those with weakened immune systems who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to experience severe symptoms from COVID-19 and other illnesses.¹⁷

Messages for Young People

- COVID-19 spreads mainly through person-to-person contact, but it may be possible to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose, or possibly your eyes. Therefore, smoking and vaping can increase the possibility for the virus to be transmitted from hands to mouth.¹⁸
- Sharing any type of tobacco or smoking product, including e-cigarettes, can increase the risk of spreading COVID-19. Practice social distancing according to community guidelines and do not share tobacco products with others.
- You can play a part in reducing the health impacts of COVID-19 for yourself and others by choosing not to smoke and vape. When you limit social contact and do not spread secondhand smoke or vapor, you are helping to keep your friends, family members and high-risk people from getting sick.
- [USE ONLY THROUGH DEC. 31] Smoking and vaping are always unsafe. If you have questions about your use or want support, Colorado QuitLine coaches are available 24/7. You can call, text

<https://www.mncee.org/getattachment/Resources/Projects/Secondhand-Smoke-Research/Reduction-of-Environmental-Tobacco-Smoke-Transfer-in-Minnesota-Multifamily-Buildings-Using-Air-Sealing-and-Ventilation-Treatments.pdf.aspx>

¹³ Source: University of California Merced.

¹⁴ The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/prepare-protect-yourself/protect-those-at-higher-risk/covid-19-and-people-with-chronic-disease>

¹⁵ Prompetchara, E., Ketloy, C. & Palaga, T. Immune responses in COVID-19 and potential vaccines: Lessons learned from SARS and MERS epidemic. Asian Pacific journal of allergy and immunology, 10.12932/AP-200220-200772, doi:10.12932/AP-200220-0772 (2020).

¹⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/secondhand_smoke/health_effects/index.htm

¹⁷ Source: University of California Merced.

¹⁸ Source: World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-smoking-and-covid-19>

or reach out online anytime if you're concerned about smoking/vaping, or if you're ready to make a change. It's cost-free and confidential.

- [USE STARTING JAN. 1] Smoking and vaping are always unsafe. If you have questions about your use or want support, Colorado QuitLine coaches are available 24/7. Text "Start My Quit" to 855.891.9989 or visit mylifemyquit.org to learn more.
- If you are experiencing increased stress, loneliness or anxiety because of COVID-19, it can be hard to stay quit, especially if you have smoked or vaped to destress. It's okay to ask for support. Visit COYouthQuitline.org to talk to or chat online with a coach. [NOTE Starting Jan. 1, use this CTA: Text "Start My Quit" to 855.891.9989 or visit mylifemyquit.org to learn more.]

Responding to Questions About Nicotine's Preventative Effect on COVID-19

Note: we do not recommend proactively discussing this, but are providing these messages in the event that you are asked about it.

- **What we know:** The results of a small French study suggested that the use of nicotine or nicotine replacement products could help prevent people from contracting COVID-19.¹⁹
 - The study surveyed 480 COVID-19 patients and suggested that those who smoke daily are less likely to develop a severe case of the virus.
 - The study states that in controlled settings, nicotine could provide an efficient treatment for COVID-19 patients.
 - However, the study still acknowledges nicotine as an addictive drug that can have severe health consequences.
- **Response:** There is still a lot we don't know about the relationship between nicotine and COVID-19. Several studies have also suggested that smoking is most likely associated with the negative progression and adverse outcomes of COVID-19. Therefore, more information is needed in order to claim that nicotine or nicotine substitutes could help in fighting COVID-19 symptoms. Researchers have warned against jumping to conclusions from one small study.
- Nicotine remains an addictive drug that endangers the health of users. It is not recommended that anyone start using nicotine products if they do not already.

¹⁹ "Fact check: Are smokers at less risk for contracting the coronavirus?" *USA Today*
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/05/03/covid-19-fact-check-caution-urged-study-virus-smoking/3055378001/>