

Smokers, vapers in special danger from coronavirus

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(HealthDay)—Smokers and vapers who get COVID-19 are more likely

to have complications, so this might be a good time to quit, the Society of Thoracic Surgeons says.

An early study from China looked at 78 hospitalized COVID-19 patients. Researchers found those with a history of smoking had 14 times the risk of needing a higher level care, requiring a ventilator, and/or dying.

COVID-19 death rates in China are higher in men than in women, and higher smoking rates in men in that country may be a reason why.

"As COVID-19 is a virus that primarily attacks the lungs, anything that harms the lungs can weaken patients and result in more severe effects if people do become infected. It is well-known that smoking results in worse outcomes in people with pneumonia or influenza, and we are learning that smoking can pose significant risks in those with COVID-19," thoracic surgeon Dr. Matthew Steliga wrote in a patient guide from the society.

He pointed out that [smoking](#) thickens the mucus lining people's airways, making it harder to clear away inhaled fungi, bacteria and viruses.

"This leads to more particles and [infectious agents](#) trapped in the lungs and more difficulty in clearing out this material," wrote Steliga, who practices at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. "Those who smoke have a greater chance of getting respiratory infections, and when one does have an infection, it is harder to recover from it. Even an occasional cigarette or [secondhand smoke](#) has been linked to increased risks from acute respiratory distress syndrome."

And, he warned, electronic cigarettes aren't any safer than traditional cigarettes.

They can suppress [immune function](#), and some research suggests that vaping impairs mucus clearance and the body's ability to fight infection, Steliga said.

"We do not have clear long-term data about e-cigarette use and COVID-19, but it is agreed that the best way to avoid complications from COVID-19 is to keep your lungs as clean and healthy as possible," he said in a society news release.

More information: The World Health Organization has more on [smoking and COVID-19](#).

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