

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)



Guidance for **SMOKERS**

For more info. on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)
Call: 16000, or visit: www.moph.gov.qa



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Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for the people of Qatar who are smokers

What is Coronavirus disease (Covid-19)?

COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease with symptoms including fever, cough and shortness of breath.

How do people get infected?

Coronavirus is transmitted, like any other viruses that attacks the respiratory system, from one infected person to another in the droplets when they sneeze, cough or speak especially if at a distance of less than one or two meters. It can also be transmitted through close contact with the infected person or touching surfaces.

Are smokers and tobacco users at higher risk?

Tobacco has a huge impact on respiratory health and hence smokers are likely to be more vulnerable to COVID-19. Smokers may also already have lung disease or reduced lung capacity which would greatly increase risk of serious illness.

Also, the act of smoking means that fingers (and possibly contaminated cigarettes) are in contact with lips which increases the possibility of transmission of virus from hand to mouth.

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.

Conditions that increase oxygen needs or reduce the ability of the body to use it properly will put patients at higher risk of serious lung conditions such as pneumonia.

Why is this a good time to try and quit tobacco use?

Tobacco use dramatically increases the risk of many serious health problems, including both respiratory problems (like lung cancer, TB and COPD) and cardiovascular diseases. While this means that it is always a good idea to quit tobacco use, quitting tobacco use may be especially important at this time to reduce the harm caused by COVID-19. Tobacco users are probably less likely to become infected if they quit because the absence of smoking helps reduce the touching of fingers to the mouth. Also, it is possible that they would better manage the comorbid conditions if they become infected because quitting tobacco use has an almost immediate positive impact on lung and cardiovascular function and these improvements only increase as time goes on.

Such improvement may increase the ability of COVID-19 patients to respond to the infection and reduce the risk of death. Faster recovery and milder symptoms also reduce the risk of the transmission of the disease to other people.

How can smokers strengthen their immune system?

- Stop smoking
- Remain hydrated; drink plenty of water
- Have a balanced diet, high in fruits and vegetables (or as indicated by your healthcare professionals) and eat less processed meat, less red meat, and fewer sweets
- Although there is not yet a vaccine for coronavirus, smokers should stay up to date on their vaccinations such as those for pneumonia and flu
- Control other health conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes;
- Get adequate sleep
- Maintain regular exercise even if you are staying at home and maintain a healthy weight
- Avoid unnecessary stress, stress can weaken the immune system

What protective measures should smokers take?

- Follow the instructions of MoPH by practicing physical distancing, staying home, avoiding crowds, parks and refraining from touching one another or surfaces;
- Take steps to avoid infection, such as washing your hands frequently and cooking meats thoroughly;
- Always use a face mask and protective gloves when visiting public areas (i.e. grocery shopping or attending an appointment), at work and even at home when there is a family gathering;
- Personal hygiene is extremely important for smokers at this time of the virus outbreak. Wash your hands with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcoholic-based solution (60%) or a sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth (or ensure you wash your hands before an after);
- Clean surfaces touched often like doorknobs, handles, steering wheels, or light switches with a disinfectant to remove the virus;
- Have the contact information of your health care provider at hand so that you do not need to leave the house, if you become ill.

What should smokers, if they get the virus?

- If you are showing symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, fever or shortness of breath you may need assessment by healthcare professional. Start self-quarantine, avoid any contact with others and call the national **COVID-19 hotline on 16000**;
- Practice typical "Sick day rules" for people with an infection:
 - Ensure you continue to take important medication
 - If you live alone and have to go out, only do so with a family member or a friend;
 - Rest and postpone exercise
- Monitor temperature, when needed use acetaminophen (paracetamol/ Panadol) rather than anti-inflammatory (ibuprofen/ Advil);
- Always follow healthcare professional team recommendations.

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