

Supplementary Guidance on Smoking, Vaping and Covid 19

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic represents an unprecedented challenge to health and care services, bringing intense pressure and radical change to systems, organisations and to all of us as individuals.

We know that staff who smoke or vape may feel uncertain or anxious about Covid-19 and its risk to them based on their individual circumstances. As such we have examined the current research and guidance for smokers and vapers in light of Covid-19 and have produced this short factsheet as supplementary guidance for all staff to consider.

What is Covid-19

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as MERS-CoV and SARS (Cov). The official name for this new disease, not previously seen in humans, is COVID-19. On 11 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) categorised it as a 'pandemic' which, in WHO terms, is 'the worldwide spread of a disease'.

COVID-19 spreads where there is close contact between people. If someone with the virus coughs or exhales and is close to someone else, the other person could catch it by breathing in droplets of infected fluid. People can also catch it by touching contaminated surfaces or objects. Most people infected with the virus have mild symptoms and recover, but some experience more serious illness and may need hospital care.

You can find out more information about Covid-19 [here](#). We would also encourage all staff to take a look at our [dedicated Covid-19 area on Medspace](#).

Smoking and Vaping and Covid-19

The evidence on smoking, vaping and Covid-19 is mixed and still developing.

That said, it is clear that both smoking and vaping involve repetitive hand-to-face movements, which generally provide greater risk of a route of entry into the body for viruses. To reduce the risk of contact with COVID-19, staff are advised to follow the national guidelines which include:

- washing their hands more frequently than usual, for 20 seconds, with soap and water (or use hand sanitiser if soap is not available)

We would also advise staff to ensure that they clean their e-cigarette regularly.

Staff must ensure they also follow government social distancing guidelines when using designated smoking areas on Medway Council premises. Signage will also be displayed to emphasise the importance of this.

In support of advice by Public Health England (PHE), staff are strongly advised against sharing any smoking or vaping devices with colleagues.

Smoking and COVID-19

COVID-19 is a respiratory viral infection that affects the lungs and airways. There is strong evidence that smoking tobacco is generally associated with an increased risk of developing respiratory viral infections.

Smoking causes damage to the lungs and airways and harms the immune system, reducing your ability to fight infection. Smoking also involves repetitive hand-to-face movements, which increase the risk of viruses entering the body.

Stopping smoking brings immediate health benefits, including existing smoking-related diseases. This is particularly important for smokers and the NHS at a time of intense pressure on the health service.

Further advice and information from the national government regarding smoking and Covid-19 can be accessed [here](#).

Vaping and COVID-19

There is very little evidence on vaping and COVID-19 and it is unknown whether vaping makes someone more susceptible to severe disease if they become infected. If it does, the risk is likely to be much less than smoking.

Public Health England (2015) states that vaping is around 95% safer for users than smoking, and it is important that vapers avoid returning to smoking.

PHE's 2018 independent e-cigarette evidence review found that, to date, there have been no identified health risks of passive vaping to bystanders. There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 can be contracted from passive exposure to e-cigarette vapour, but in the absence of evidence, PHE recommend that vapers avoid exhaling clouds of vapour in the presence of others

This advice is also echoed by the national government [here](#).

With this in mind, staff who vape should be mindful of others around them and control the levels of exhaled vapour where possible (i.e. adjusting the device power to reduce vapour).