Lung Health and COVID-19
Smoking, Vaping, and Pre-Existing Conditions

The guidance below is provided to decrease complications related to COVID-19 for those individuals who smoke, vape, or have a pre-existing health condition. The Chester County Tobacco-Free Coalition (CCTFC) is a collaborative community effort dedicated to empowering youth and adults to live nicotine-free. We hope you share this information with your school, worksite, neighbors, family and friends.

What we know about Pre-Existing Conditions and COVID-19:

- COVID-19 is a serious respiratory virus that aggressively attacks the lungs. It can impact anyone of any age, and there is currently no cure or vaccine.

- Those with one or more of the pre-existing conditions below are at an increased risk of developing complications related to COVID-19:
    - Smoking or Vaping
    - Asthma, COPD or other lung diseases
    - Cancer
    - Diabetes
    - Heart disease
    - A compromised immune system from chemotherapy, autoimmune disorders, HIV, etc.

- Having a pre-existing condition does **not** increase the risk of contracting COVID-19. The virus is primarily spread through respiratory droplets of an infected person, or by touching a surface that is contaminated with the virus.

How to manage a Pre-Existing Condition during COVID-19:

- Practice healthy behaviors and keep an open relationship with your health care provider, including:
    - Call your health care provider if you feel sick with COVID-19 symptoms or otherwise
    - Restock regular medications, ideally a 90-day supply
    - Clean and disinfect things you or your family touch frequently
    - Practice social distancing, keeping at least six feet of distance from others
    - Stay home as much as possible to further reduce your risk of being exposed

- People with asthma should follow their individual Asthma Action Plan, and continue to use current medications like inhalers with steroids. Avoid known asthma triggers, and minimize the use of disinfectants that can cause an asthma attack. If possible, have someone who doesn't have asthma do the cleaning and disinfecting.

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What we know about Smoking / Vaping and COVID-19:

- COVID-19 attacks the lungs, and behaviors that weaken the lungs put individuals at greater risk. The World Health Organization (WHO) says smokers and tobacco users are at an increased risk of developing more severe symptoms of COVID-19, because they may already have lung damage and decreased lung capacity. We know that our lungs rely on the normal defenses in our airways to keep bacteria and viruses away. We also know that inhaling irritating substances like smoke or vape (in the form of tobacco, nicotine or cannabis) impacts lung functioning, disrupts the immune system, and causes inflammation in our airways, leaving lung tissue susceptible to infection.

- Smoking increases the risk for respiratory infections, weakens the immune system, and is the primary cause of chronic health conditions like COPD, diabetes, and heart disease. These diseases are considered pre-existing conditions that contribute to COVID-19 complications.

- We know that vaping is related to lung injury, and lung injury is one of the factors in more severe presentation of COVID-19 cases.

    o In December 2018, the Surgeon General issued an advisory on e-cigarette use among youth, declaring the growing problem an epidemic.
        - According to the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), 5.3 million youth were current e-cigarette users in 2019; an increase of over 3 million students since 2017
        - Accordingly to the PA Youth Survey, Chester County high school seniors were above state average for vaping (past 30-day use, 2017), and all of Chester County high school grades were above state average for vaping other drugs, like marijuana or hash oil

    o As of February 28, 2020, a total of 2,807 hospitalized E-cigarette or Vaping Associated Lung Injury (EVALI) cases or deaths have been reported to the CDC from all 50 states.
        - Laboratory data from the CDC show that vitamin E acetate, an additive in some THC-containing e-cigarette or vaping products, is strongly linked to the EVALI outbreak

- Anxious times like a pandemic, the stress of a new schedule, online learning, etc. can trigger substance use to "self-soothe". The majority of e-cigarettes and vape products are purchased online. In 2017, researchers had identified more than 15,500 unique vape flavors available online. We know that students are spending time at home, and may be unsupervised.

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How to be a "Quarantine Quitter":

- To protect health and reduce the risk of severe complications from COVID-19, smokers and vapers are urged to make every effort to quit. Research has shown that quitting nicotine rapidly improves lung function.

- Free, easy-to-access cessation services are offered through phone/text, app or online.
  - **Resources to Help Smokers Quit:**
    - Pennsylvania Free Quit Line
      1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669) / 1-855-DEJELO-YA (335-3569)
    - Chester County Tobacco-Free Coalition (CCTFC) members offer free smoking cessation classes and support groups. Visit www.chesco.org/cctfc or call one of the options below.
      - ChesPenn Health Services (Call to register: 610-383-3888)
      - Chester County Hospital: Penn Medicine (Call to register: 610-738-2300)
      - Main Line Health (Call to register: 484-227-FREE)
      - Phoenixville Hospital (Call to register: 610-983-1021)

  - **Resources to Help Teens Quit Vaping:**
    - Caron Treatment Centers: CONNECT 5 is a nicotine reduction and cessation digital experience designed to help youth make a positive impact on their health.
    - National Jewish Health: My Life, My Quit shares the truth about vaping nicotine and other tobacco products. Text "Start My Quit" to 855-891-9989 or call to talk with a coach who is ready to listen.
    - Truth Initiative: This is Quitting has helped more than 100,000 youth and young adults on their journey to quit vaping. Additional resources are available for parents of young vapers and for adults who want to quit.
    - Pennsylvania Free Quit Line, available to youth ages 14 years and older
      1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669) / 1-855-DEJELO-YA (335-3569)

- If quitting is not an option, encourage youth to reduce the amount they vape. This is also known as tapering, and can be used as a cessation method as well.

- Move more! Any form of physical activity will enhance airflow and expand lung health, which is important during the outbreak of a respiratory virus. Daily walks, streaming a fitness program, or doing basic stretches are all beneficial to manage stress and keep lungs healthy.

- Smokers/vapers will naturally touch their faces more often than non-smokers/non-vapers. Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes. Wash hands with soap and water frequently, or use a 60% alcohol based hand sanitizer if a sink is unavailable. Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face mask when around others.

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<u>Lung Health Resources:</u>

- [American Lung Association (ALA)](#)

- [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#)

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Coronavirus (COVID-19)](#)

- [Coronavirus and Cancer (ACS)](#)

- [People Who Need to Take Extra Precautions (CDC)](#)

- [Smoking and Respiratory Diseases (CDC)](#)

- [What You Need to Know About Smoking, Vaping and COVID-19 (ALA)](#)