

Editorial Note on Correlation of Tobacco/Nicotine in any Form Including E-cigarettes to COVID 19

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For all major Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) Like Hypertension, Diabetes, Cancer and Chronic Obstructive Airway diseases, Tobacco is the most important preventable risk factor. In India and many other countries more than 60% deaths are due to NCDs and are likely to increase. All patients with these co-morbidities are more prone to COVID 19.

It is well documented that, smoking of tobacco or E-Cigarette would increase chances of acquiring COVID-19 infection and progression of this deadly disease. Smoking affects and reduces general immunity of the body and reduces cell-mediated immunity. Smoking also reduces the mobility of cilia (small fibers on the surface of the lungs) that clean, defend and protect the lungs. It is clear that the COVID-19 as well as smoking, directly and seriously affect lung health.

When a person smokes there is a contact between the cigarettes, lips and the fingers, which may be contaminated. Hookah smoking is often a social activity with sharing of pipes and mouth pieces, so there are more chances of transmission of all kinds of infections.

In the largest study from China, there were 1099 patients; 173 severe; and 926 non-severe. The data shows that out of serious patients, 16.9% were presently smoking and those who had to be admitted to ICU or required ventilator support or those who ultimately died, 25.5% were declared as smokers at the time of admission.

There is also a misconception among the general public that water pipe or hookah smoking is less harmful than cigarette and E-Cigarette smoking, as these also affect the lung's health equally. There are at least 82 toxic chemicals and carcinogens in hookah smoke. The heating of charcoal used to heat tobacco in hookah poses health risks since the heating process produces harmful products such as carbon monoxide, metals, and other chemicals.

In a meta-analysis of 12 scientific papers to see the correlation between smoking and progress of COVID-19, data of 9,025 COVID-19 patients was analyzed. The smokers were found with greater progression of COVID-19 than people who never smoked.

It is also a myth that e-cigarettes are a safer alternative as in 2019, many people lost lives due to "E-cigarettes use or vaping product use associated lung injury (EVALI). As per WHO, there is no scientific evidence or information that tobacco or nicotine reduces the risk of Corona infection or beneficial in treating COVID-19.

The current pandemic can be considered as an opportunity to enforce the smoke free laws in countries and even prohibit tobacco use and also E-Cigarettes in view of the critical situation. This will save non-smokers from unwanted second-hand smoke which is as dangerous as smoking itself. This will also lead to more tobacco cessation efforts and better results.

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