

Smoking and vaping cause harm to the lungs, leaving lung tissue inflamed, fragile, and open to infection. People who smoke are more likely to have severe symptoms if they get COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>2</sup> In addition, people with pre-existing conditions related to tobacco use are at a higher risk of severe COVID-19 complications.<sup>4</sup>

This is an especially important time to address tobacco use within multi-unit housing properties.



## Health Risks of Tobacco Use During COVID-19

### Smoking and Vaping

- Smoking and vaping require a hand-to-mouth motion and people often touch their mouths with their fingers while smoking or vaping. Hookah/water-pipe users often share mouthpieces and hoses with others.<sup>3</sup> Both of these activities may increase COVID-19 risk.
- Hand-to-mouth contact reinforces the importance of washing our hands frequently and not touching our faces.
- If an individual is infected with COVID-19, the virus can spread quickly if that individual does not properly sanitize their hands after smoking or vaping.

### Masks

- In order to smoke or vape, facial masks need to be removed. Up to one in four individuals infected with COVID-19 might have no symptoms or very mild symptoms and may be unknowingly spreading the virus.<sup>1</sup>
- The use of a cloth mask can help slow the spread of COVID-19. These types of masks are not intended to protect the wearer but to protect against the unintended transmission, in case you are an asymptomatic carrier of the coronavirus. Removing a mask to smoke or vape puts others at risk.

### Physical Distancing

- Maintaining physical distancing is a challenge within a designated smoking area. Limiting face-to-face contact with others remains an effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- When someone infected with COVID-19 talks, coughs, or sneezes, they are releasing virus droplets from their mouth and nose. These can travel up to six feet and could potentially land in the mouth or nose of someone nearby and then be inhaled into the lungs.
- Individuals may not have symptoms but may still be infected and able to spread COVID-19. This is why it is important to maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet, which can be a challenge with one designated area to smoke or vape.

*Tobacco in this document refers specifically to the use of manufactured, commercial tobacco products, and not to the sacred, medicinal, and traditional use of tobacco by American Indians and other groups.*

## As a property manager, what can I do to support my residents?

Residents may be having a difficult time due to the stress and uncertainty of COVID-19. Additionally, more families are spending time in the home, which increases the potential for secondhand smoke exposure and is especially harmful to undeveloped young lungs. This is a great time to support residents by encouraging positive coping mechanisms and creating a supportive living environment for any quit attempts residents might be making.

### Encourage Positive Coping for Those Working Towards Quitting Tobacco



#### Keep your mouth busy

Choose crunchy, satisfying foods such as raw vegetables, sugarless gum, nuts, or sunflower seeds.



#### Schedule time for projects

Busying your hands and mind can boost your mood and distract from the urge to smoke.



#### Notice your triggers

Are there certain things that make you want to vape or smoke indoors? Try making a list of these things.



#### Do Healthy Activities

Healthy activities, getting fresh air, and being physically active will help make you feel better.



#### Breathe

Taking slow, deep breaths can help you relax.



#### Quit Kits

The American Lung Association can provide FREE quit kits that contain various items to help manage cravings.

### Smokefree Policies

It is important to protect all residents, staff, and guests from the harms of secondhand smoke or vape. If your building does not already have one, this can be done by implementing a smokefree policy that encourages residents to take their tobacco use out of the building and off of the grounds. If your building does have a smokefree policy in place, consider revisiting this policy to make sure the language is up to date. The American Lung Association offers free support for smokefree policies.

### Reminders

Send out a notice reminding residents of any current smokefree policy details.

### NRT

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can be helpful in managing cravings during this stressful time even if someone is still working towards quitting tobacco use. Having resources on hand to provide to residents can be a valuable way to support them. Quit Partner is available to all Minnesota residents and is a free quit tobacco resource. The American Lung Association can provide you with Quit Partner handouts to keep on hand.



Quit Partner™ is Minnesota's free way to quit nicotine, including smoking, vaping and chewing. Quit Partner can support your quit with one-on-one coaching and other helpful tools. Quit Partner is here to help 24/7. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669) or visit [www.QuitPartnerMN.com](http://www.QuitPartnerMN.com).



Coaching over the phone or online



Patches, gum, or lozenges, ages 18+



Text messaging, ages 13+



Email support, ages 13+

We can help you with these activities. Contact the American Lung Association for support implementing a smokefree policy or to get resources that meet the needs of your property. Email us at [SmokeFreeHousing@Lung.org](mailto:SmokeFreeHousing@Lung.org)

### References:

1. <https://www.lung.org/blog/smoking-and-covid19>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
3. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-on-smoking-and-covid-19>
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0625-update-expands-covid-19.html>