

# FACTSHEET

## COVID-19 and tobacco

The primary role of the Institute of Public Health is to inform public policy to support healthier populations in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Institute is currently assisting the Departments of Health, North and South, with evidence review and policy development on the impact of COVID-19 and related Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) on population health.

This factsheet provides a summary of evidence relating to COVID-19 and tobacco.

This factsheet series is a 'snapshot' based on a review of available evidence at the time of writing. The factsheets will be routinely reviewed and periodically dated

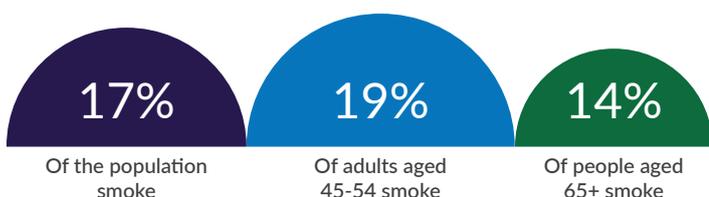
Dated: September 2020. View more at [publichealth.ie](http://publichealth.ie)

### KEY FACTS:

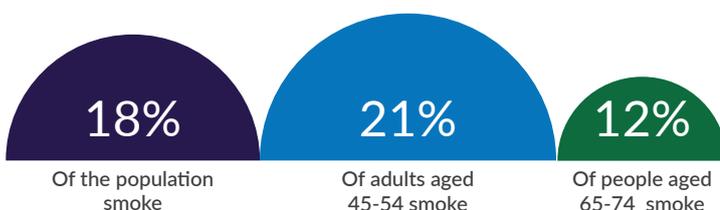
- 1 Smokers are at an increased risk of severe COVID-19 disease. There is an elevated risk for former smokers, and a potential doubling of risk for current smokers. Disease caused by smoking – such as cardiovascular and chronic lung disease – increases the risk of severe COVID-19.
- 2 17% of the population in Ireland smoke. Among older people (a vulnerable group for severe COVID-19), 1 in 7 are currently smoking and a further 28% are former smokers. This means that 4 in 10 older people may experience additional risk from COVID-19 as a result of their smoking history.
- 3 18% of the population in Northern Ireland smoke. Among older people aged 65 and over (a vulnerable group for severe COVID-19), 1 in 10 are currently smoking and a further 31% are former smokers. This means that nearly 4 in 10 older people experience additional risk from COVID-19 as a result of their smoking history.
- 4 Smoking is associated with repeated hand to mouth contact, a behavioural risk for transmission of the virus. Sharing of cigarettes and the use of roll-your-own tobacco may also increase transmission.

- 5 There is potential for transmission via use of tobacco waterpipes, in terms of shared use and the social context of use. Many countries have implemented additional regulation on waterpipes in the context of COVID-19.
- 6 Most people who smoke want to quit. Engaging with 'stop smoking' supports doubles the chances of quitting for good. Stop smoking services deliver a service based on best evidence, are free and welcome engagement from smokers, e-cigarette users and dual users.
- 7 Although many smokers made increased attempts to quit smoking, some subgroups increased the amount they smoked during "lockdown". Smokers who also reported stress, anxiety or loneliness were more likely to increase the amount they smoked. People with mental health issues are particularly vulnerable to tobacco-related harms at this time.
- 8 Some data suggest an increase in exposure to second-hand smoke in home environments during the "lockdown" period.
- 9 The relationship between e-cigarettes use and COVID-19 is unclear at this time. Increased transmission risk has been suggested in terms of increased hand to face contact and the ability of the virus to remain in aerosols and on plastic and stainless-steel surfaces.
- 10 Some people experience long-term effects from COVID-19, particularly those who experienced severe illness requiring ventilation. Smokers appear to be at higher risk of experiencing neurological issues including stroke during the course of COVID-19.

#### IRELAND



#### NORTHERN IRELAND



**"...Now is the time to give up cigarette smoking. We are beginning to see some evidence that does not surprise us that cigarette smoking, and those that have a history of cigarette smoking, are at more risk in relation to serious forms of COVID-19."**

*Dr Tony Holohan, CMO, Dep of Health Ireland.*

Check out the below supports to help you to quit smoking:

**QUIT**

Ireland - visit [quit.ie](http://quit.ie) or phone 1800 201 203



Northern Ireland - visit [stopsmokingni.info](http://stopsmokingni.info)