

# **Smoking and Covid-19**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**For those working in the community during  
and post COVID-19**

**ash** wales  
cymru  
action on smoking and health

# Q1. Why do we need to encourage smokers in Wales to quit?

## Health of the smoker

Evidence shows smokers who contract Covid-19 go on to develop more severe symptoms (1). Smoking is detrimental to the immune system and its responsiveness to infections (2).

Smoking is also a leading cause of cardiovascular, respiratory and cancer conditions that put patients at high risk if they catch the virus.

The act of smoking means hands are in contact with the mouth increasing the likelihood of transmission of the virus.

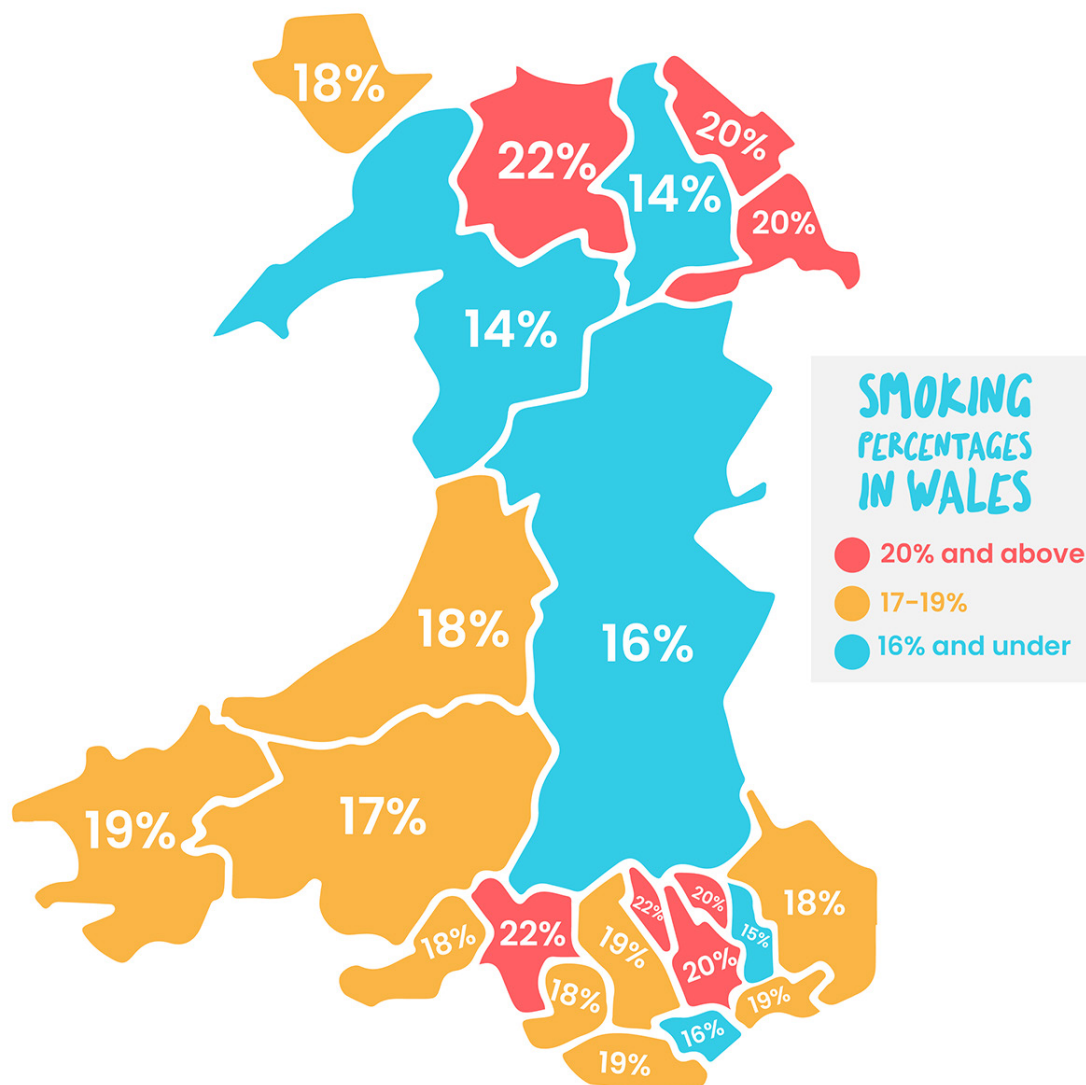
For people who smoke, stopping now is also one of the best things they can do to improve their overall health. Many people are feeling more motivated to quit as a result of concerns over COVID-19 (3).



## Scale of the problem

Wales has 440,000 smokers, 20% of adults from the most deprived areas of Wales smoke compared to 14% among the least deprived adults (4).

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on deprived communities, with areas of deprivation experiencing higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 and existing poor health conditions which also put them at risk (5). Tobacco use is the single biggest cause of health inequalities in Wales (6) and it is anticipated that health inequalities will increase as a result of the economic impact of Covid-19.



We also know Welsh citizens are facing increasing financial hardship as a result of the lockdown. A family with two adults smoking 10 cigarettes a day could save up to a minimum of £62 a week, if they are given the right support to quit.



## Ease pressure on NHS

Smokers are around 30% more likely to require hospital admission than non-smokers (7).

Quitting smoking leads to immediate benefits – for example improved blood pressure, reduced respiratory infections and heart disease – this could ease pressure on hospital admissions.





## Q2. 'Do smokers want to quit?'

68% of smokers in Wales say they would like to quit. (8)

Since the Covid-19 outbreak across the UK there has been a rise in smokers quitting due to Covid-19 fears, including an estimated 37,000 smokers in Wales (3).

In April 2020, NHS Wales' Help Me Quit saw a 51% increase in the number of smokers contacting the service (3).

**Smokers are reacting positively to #QuitforCovid messaging and it is important now more than ever they are given every opportunity to quit successfully.**

## Q3. 'What about reports saying smoking can protect you from the virus?'

In May, the World Health Organisation issued a statement stressing that there is currently insufficient information to confirm any link between tobacco or nicotine in the prevention or treatment of COVID-19 (9).

The reports of a trial in France (10) on nicotine patches to help prevent or lessen symptoms of COVID-19 should not put smokers off trying to quit, but encourage them to use other sources of nicotine to help them quit smoking tobacco.

Nicotine replacement therapy such as patches and gum are prescribed by doctors and provided by pharmacists as a safe and effective way to stop people from smoking.

Smoking tobacco, however, is not safe. It contains over 5,000 deadly chemicals, many of which cause cancer and it is the leading cause of premature death in Wales.

## **Q4. 'People are more stressed since Covid-19, surely they'll just smoke more?'**

There is a common misbelief that smoking aids relaxation and that often prevents smokers from quitting successfully. It's also the reason why ex-smokers often start smoking again.

The current uncertainties around health and the economy are making most people very anxious and stressed. We already know that stress and boredom are triggers for smoking.

During this time of increased stress and anxiety it is important we encourage people in Wales to look after their health and well-being. Evidence shows that smoking does not support good mental health, and stopping smoking is associated with improvements in conditions such as depression, stress and anxiety (11).

If people are concerned about returning to smoking or increasing the amount they smoke, they can use other sources of nicotine like nicotine replacement therapy or e-cigarettes to help manage cravings.



## Q5. 'What about smoking and finances during and after the pandemic?'

COVID-19 is causing significant financial stress. Quitting smoking can help people save money and lift households out of poverty (12).

In April 2020 the minimum price for a pack of 20 cigarettes is £8.94, so someone smoking 10 cigarettes a day would spend a minimum of £1,632 a year, £136 a month and £31 a week.

For a couple that means £3,264 a year, £272 a month and £62 a week – enough to pay for regular food shops.

Alternatively, if smokers switch to nicotine replacement therapy, they can save nearly £700 a year, and smokers switching to e-cigarettes can save around £800.

It is important that this information is communicated to smokers, alongside a referral for free NHS support.

You can find a cost of smoking calculator on the [ASH Wales website](https://www.ashwales.org.uk).

**ASH Wales also have cost of smoking wheels which are a great conversation starter around smoking & finances. If you're interested in using this resource post- lockdown restrictions please contact [kimberley@ashwales.org.uk](mailto:kimberley@ashwales.org.uk)**



## Q6. What support is out there for smokers?

People in Wales who need help to stop smoking can still access support from the NHS. This includes telephone support and free stop smoking medication.

They can call NHS Wales Help Me Quit on 0800 085 2219 or visit the website [helpmequit.wales](https://helpmequit.wales)

**Smokers who receive NHS support are 4x more likely to quit successfully than those who go it alone.**



Smokers can also call their local pharmacy to confirm if their local stop smoking service is currently available.

Alternatively, a wide range of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) is sold in supermarkets, this includes products such as patches, gum, lozenges. The ASH Wales website has information and guidance on [using NRT to quit smoking.](#)

## Q7. 'What about vaping?'

E-cigarettes are the most common quit smoking tool in Wales (4).

Some media are reporting that vapers face additional risks from coronavirus however the evidence for this is far less clear. Smokers who have switched to vaping should be reassured that this is better for them than smoking regular cigarettes.



# Sources

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