



TOBACCO USE AND COVID-19

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is providing this overview of the potential impact of tobacco use and COVID-19 for First Nations. During these times, it is important to be aware of any increased risks to you and your family. As the situation is evolving rapidly, we encourage you to visit the AFN COVID-19 webpage to access up to date information and resources at <https://www.afn.ca/coronavirus>.

Traditional tobacco use

First Nations have a long history with tobacco as it has traditionally been used to honour the Creator and is governed by cultural protocols for spiritual and ceremonial uses. First Nations use tobacco in different ways. Traditional tobacco use is thought to have an overall positive effect on health. When used traditionally and ceremonially, tobacco is important in affirming First Nations identity and fostering self-worth which promotes health and well-being among individuals and communities.

Commercial tobacco use

Today's commercial form of tobacco contains additives which can cause sickness, disease and death. Forty percent of First Nations adults and nearly a third of on-reserve First Nations teens and 14 percent of teens living off-reserve reported smoking commercial tobacco daily. Misuse of commercial tobacco has been shown to cause major health conditions such as respiratory disease, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. When individuals with these underlying medical conditions become infected with COVID-19, they are at increased risk of severe outcomes, such as pneumonia.

How tobacco use increases health risks during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Smoking increases the risk of contracting COVID-19 because it destroys some of the lung's natural defense mechanisms
- The act of smoking means that fingers are in contact with the lips which increases the possibility of transmission of the virus from hand to mouth
- People who smoke may already have lung disease or reduced lung capacity, which increases the risk of serious illness
- Sharing pipes and other smoking products involves sharing of mouth pieces, which could facilitate the transmission of COVID-19

How to reduce your risks

- Practice physical distancing by not smoking in groups
- Do not share tobacco products such as vape pens, pipes and cigarettes
- Consider reducing or stopping commercial tobacco use. When you feel ready, contact your local health centre, NIHB Program or NIHB Navigator for resources to assist you.

Additional resources:

First Nations Health Authority: Respecting Tobacco Resources <https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-and-the-first-nations-health-authority/wellness-streams/respecting-tobacco>

Cancer Care Ontario: Quit Smoking Resources <https://tobaccowise.cancercareontario.ca/en/quit-smoking>

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-smoking-and-covid-19>

Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB): <https://www.sacisc.gc.ca/eng/1572537161086/1572537234517>

