Press Release

COVID19, smoking and vaping

Premier Peter Gutwein has acknowledged that COVID19 will enter Tasmania when our state border reopens. We have had a recent warning with an individual entering the state with COVID. We must do everything feasible to protect Tasmanians from the ill effects of the pandemic.

Recent research by Dr Clift and colleagues at the University of Oxford in the UK supports a causal effect of smoking on risk of severe COVID-19. This large study showed that smokers have almost double the risk of hospitalisation than non-smokers. It also showed that smoking more than doubled the risk of COVID19-associated death with that risk increasing with the frequency of smoking.

The Respiratory Translational Research Group of Dr Sohal and colleagues have recently conducted research into vape liquids found here in Tasmania. They tested vape liquids bought in Launceston and found that they are highly toxic. The chemicals found in vape liquids can lead to microbial infections, inflammation, cellular stress, scarring of the lungs and cancer in the long term.

Dr. Sohal’s group also found vaping enhances the expression of the receptor used by COVID-19 virus to enable access to the lungs, according to their recent study published in the Journal of Clinical Medicine. Similar changes have been reported by the group with smokers and patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), where smoking creates a highly conductive environment for the COVID-19 virus to thrive, study was published earlier this year in the American Journal of Physiology-Lung Cellular and Molecular Physiology.

What many vapers may not realise is that any combination of fluid can be placed into these devices, whether stipulated by the manufacturers or not, meaning they are likely inhaling a long list of harmful chemicals. This is most concerning in young vape users who, by naively experimenting with a combination of inhalants, could end up with ongoing respiratory distress and long-term lung damage.

“The lung is designed for air exchange, to breathe air in and out. Vaping is not a natural thing and is not what lungs are made for”, Dr Sohal said.

The 70,500 smokers in Tasmania should be a priority for vaccination.

“If ever there was a time to consider quitting smoking it is right now before the Tasmanian border opens. We strongly recommend if you are a smoker or a vaper, to have a COVID vaccination” Prof Crocombe said.

Whilst there is no evidence that vaping will reduce smoking rates, [new provisions](https://www.tga.gov.au/sites/default/files/nicotine-vaping-products-and-vaping-devices_0.pdf) came into effect on 1 October which allow doctors to prescribe vape liquids to be imported for patients who want to quit smoking. At the same it is very disturbing that product related to tobacco industry is now part of the Australian medical prescription.

With the highest smoking rates in Australia, we need to ensure that our hospitals are not overwhelmed by smokers becoming critically ill with Covid19

People who want to quit smoking or vaping should contact their doctor, pharmacist, or Quit Tasmania.

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