

- Virus

Smoking, vaping raise Covid Severity risk

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Tobacco smokers and vapers are vulnerable to contracting Covid-19 and risk hospitalisation following severe symptoms, medical experts said.

A recent study by the Department of Health – Abu Dhabi (DOH) on 2,000 Covid-19 patients found that up to 13 per cent vapers required hospitalisation, more than three times of those who don't smoke. The number was down to 6 per cent among smokers. Dr Umar Majid, specialist respiratory medicine, NMC Specialty Hospital, Al Ain, noted smokers or vapers have increased risk of developing more severe Covid-19 symptoms, organ failure or in some cases even death.

“Both smoking and vaping release a number of harmful chemicals and particles into the lungs that lowers the immune response to infections. Covid-19 primarily attacks the lungs, hence smokers are more likely to get serious lung infections such as pneumonia. They are at greater risk of a complication called acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), where the fluid builds up in the tiny air-sacs in the lungs. This distress lowers the oxygen supply in our lungs causing multiple organ failure, or even death in some cases.”

Dr Majid added that smokers and vapers face high risk for contracting Covid-19 as tobacco use involves use of fingers and lips and sharing of mouth-pieces or hoses.

“Covid-19 can be transmitted easily to smokers and vapers when they share the cigarettes, vapes, mouth-pieces and hoses with each other.

With compromised immunity, the infection can be severe leading to multiple complications.”

Dr Assem Youssef, specialist pulmonologist, Medcare Hospital Al Safa, Dubai, said that smokers and vapers may be more susceptible to pulmonary complications following a Covid-19 infection.

“Lungs are at the forefront of the immune system. When a person inhales smoke or cigarettes, lungs get irritated, and that irritation unleashes the immune system to fight that irritation and a Covid-19 infection on top of that means that your symptom response is going to be amplified.”

Dr Majid pointed out that youngsters have taken to vaping because of easy availability and belief of it being less harmful than cigarettes, but long-term use makes one prone to infections.

“Adults have commonly used this device as an alternate option to quit smoking. Vapes are generally less harmful than regular smoking. Having said that, it's still not safe for consumption as it usually contains large quantities of nicotine, artificial flavouring and other chemicals to create vapours that can affect the lungs while inhaling. Nicotine makes vapes

addictive. Continuous and long-term usage of vapes will gradually affect the lungs making them susceptible to infections.”

Dr Youssef said vaping can cause EVALI, i.e., e-cigarette or vaping-associated lung injury. “Studies evaluating the pathological changes in the lungs of people who vape have described acute inflammation and damage to the air sacs. These changes may induce a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-like illness. I would expect that Covid-19 would amplify any of these changes.”