- Cardiovascular diseases

QUIT SMOKING TO REDUCE RISK OF GETTING HEART DISEASE, SAY EXPERTS

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A COALITION of health organisations calling for improved tobacco control, Protect our Next, points to South Africa's high tobacco consumption as a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD), arguing that the country urgently needs tobacco control measures that could help prevent needless CVD and other non-communicable disease deaths.



In South Africa, heart and stroke diseases have the second highest mortality rate, after TB, HIV and Aids, according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA). Over 82 000 lives are lost each year due to CVDs, which account for one in five deaths. Heart disease kills 225 South Africans a day.

"Every hour in South Africa, five people have heart attacks, 10 people have strokes, and of those events, 10 people will die. Yet, the triggers that give us our high cumulative risk score for CVDs, including tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol, are entirely preventable," says Professor Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the HSFSA and president of the African Heart Network.

Naidoo goes on to say that furthermore, since 80% of heart disease and stroke can be prevented, it's imperative that the prevalence of preventable non-communicable diseases be decreased.

The 2021 Global Adult Tobacco Survey revealed that smokers have a two to four times higher risk of developing heart disease than nonsmokers. Your risk increases with age. Even if you only smoke one cigarette a day, your risk is half that of heavy smokers, but still considerable.

Naidoo says that quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for the health of your heart and body.

Tobacco contains chemicals that can harm the heart and blood vessels. Because the heart needs to work harder to give enough oxygen to the body and brain, smoking decreases the amount of oxygen in the blood, raising blood pressure and heart rate.

Naidoo says that quitting smoking has almost immediate advantages, and if you stick with it, your risk of developing heart disease and stroke can eventually drop to

levels that are almost equivalent to those of non-smokers. E-cigarettes or vape goods can seriously affect the cardiovascular system and are just as addictive as tobacco products, she adds. "We are determined to drive awareness as well as educate South Africans, especially the youth, about the devastating impact smoking has on your cardiovascular health. Risk factors can be reduced by a large margin with effective tobacco control."

Dr Sharon Nyatsanza, deputy director of the National Council

Against Smoking, says: "To prevent the crippling health impact of smoking and reduce South Africa's high incidence of noncommunicable diseases, including CVD, that deplete our health budget, we must make it harder to smoke cigarettes, e-cigarettes or vape products, hookah pipes and other related tobacco products.

"This will protect everyone from damaging second-hand smoke and curtail the tobacco industry's ability to reach a new generation of smokers through misleading advertising."