



# Panhandle Health District

*Healthy People in Healthy Communities*

**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Panhandle Health District**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Smoking and Vaping Risk with COVID-19**

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Everyone is at risk of contracting COVID-19. For those who smoke, vape, or use e-cigarettes, the risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 could be even greater.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, COVID-19 attacks the respiratory system, so it is particularly concerning for those who may already have lung damage from smoking or vaping.

“Smoking or vaping may make individuals more susceptible to severe illness from COVID-19” states Linda Harder, Tobacco Cessation Coordinator for Panhandle Health District (PHD). “Smoking and vaping have been associated with compounding the effects of the virus in positive cases.”

There is conclusive evidence that smoking weakens the immune system and increases the risk of respiratory infections. Growing research indicates that vaping harms lung health and worsens the ability to fight respiratory infections, putting patients at higher risk of serious lung conditions such as pneumonia.

According to the World Health Organization, smokers are likely to be more vulnerable to COVID-19 as the act of smoking means that fingers are in contact with lips, mouths, and tongues which increases the possibility of transmission of the virus from hand to mouth. Smokers may also already have lung disease or reduced lung capacity which would greatly increase risk of serious illness.

We strongly encourage those who smoke, vape, or use e-cigarettes to stop sharing any devices or cigarettes, which could further the spread of COVID-19.

As we respond to the coronavirus, it is important for smokers and vapers to quit in order to reduce their risk of virus contraction and potential for more severe respiratory symptoms. Overcoming nicotine addiction is difficult under normal circumstances, so during these uncertain times, stress, anxiety, and physical isolation can add additional challenges to quitting.

“Panhandle Health District offers a tobacco and e-cig quit program, which addresses these challenges through its unique approach” says Harder.

People can call 208-415-5143 to register for the free 3-call quit program. Participants who register receive a personalized quit coach, helpful tools for quitting, and nicotine patches, gum, or lozenges to curb cravings. The coaching is provided via telephone and packages are mailed so there is no need to leave home.

Unfortunately, teen tobacco and e-cig quit classes will not be offered by PHD during the statewide stay at home order because we cannot practice social distancing in those classes. An alternative tobacco cessation program sponsored by Idaho QuitLine is available for teens who want to quit called *My Life My Quit*. This is a personalized texting program with live coaches trained to work with teens. Teens can register by texting “start” to 1-855-891-9989 or by calling this same number. More information can be found at [www.mylifemyquit.com](http://www.mylifemyquit.com)

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**Panhandle Health District** provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.

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