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Shelter in place and protect your lungs

COVID-19 is a new kind of coronavirus that has affected people and families all over the world. The virus attacks people's lungs, causing breathing problems and even death. Doctors are working to find medicine to treat sick people. Health care workers know the virus is worse for people who already have weak lungs, including people who smoke tobacco, use marijuana or vape.¹

One way to fight the spread of this virus is to practice social distancing, or shelter in place. Keeping a safe distance of at least six feet between people in public helps to fight the virus because the virus spreads very easily from one person to another.

One way people practice social distancing is to stay in their homes. But some people live in homes where family members smoke. Smoking is a health risk for the smoker, but it is also a threat to anyone near the smoker. Anyone near a smoker will breathe secondhand smoke.

There is no safe level of secondhand smoke—breathing even a small amount of it is harmful. Secondhand smoke stays in the air for hours and travels up to 20 feet.² Anyone who lives in a home where someone smokes has weaker lungs and is at higher risk from COVID-19.

Many people are now using e-cigarettes or vaping devices instead of cigarettes. Secondhand exposure from these can also harm people exposed. Aerosol produced by these devices are not just harmless water vapor. Aerosols can contain harmful chemicals including nicotine, fine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs, and heavy metals to name a few. Secondhand smoke from cannabis (marijuana) is also harmful to those exposed and has been associated with adverse health outcomes. It contains toxic chemicals such as tar, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide.³

Secondhand smoke is not the only thing people are exposed to by indoor smoking. Thirdhand smoke is a toxic residue that is left behind after smoking and builds up on floors, walls and furniture as well as on smokers' hair, skin and clothing. Young children and pets are particularly vulnerable to ingesting thirdhand smoke. ^{4,5}

More than ever, now is the best time to quit smoking. If you, or someone you know is thinking of quitting you can get information from your local Tribal Health Clinic. There are many resources to help. The California Smokers' Helpline has online tools and counselors available online and on the phone. The American Indian Commercial Tobacco Program offers help on how to stay away from or quit commercial tobacco use.

People around the world are worried about COVID-19. While our medical community learns new information about the virus, you can take steps to protect your health and the overall health of your family.

If you are interested in learning more about the dangers of secondhand smoke, California's Clean Air Project (CCAP) offers help to tribal leaders, tribal communities, local policymakers, and public health departments at the county and state levels. Visit etr.org/ccap for more information.

⁵ National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

² <https://smokefree.gov/quit-smoking/why-you-should-quit/secondhand-smoke>

³ <https://tobaccofreeca.com/secondhand-smoke/what-you-need-to-know-about-all-secondhand-smoke-and-vape/>

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. Thirdhand Smoke: A Threat to Child Health .2018

⁵ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Be Smoke-free and Help Your Pets Live Longer, Healthier Lives. 2017