

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: The Collision of Substance Use Epidemics and COVID

People with substance use disorder may be especially susceptible to COVID-19, and compromised lung function from COVID-19 could also put at risk those who have opioid use disorder and methamphetamine use disorder.

According to a recent article published in the Annals of Internal Medicine COVID-19 is causing untold challenges to health care and wider social structures. Among the vulnerable populations are persons who smoke or vape, use opioids, or have a substance use disorder (SUD). Because of direct challenges to respiratory health, those with SUD may be especially susceptible to infection by the virus that causes COVID-19 and associated complications. And because of impediments to delivering care to this population, persons with SUD who develop COVID-19 may find it harder to get care. Those in recovery will also be uniquely challenged by social distancing measures.

Risk for severe COVID-19 and death escalates with older age but is also concentrated among those who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions, including diabetes, cancer, and heart and respiratory diseases. Many of the latter arise from smoking and may increase risk for death and illness among smokers (tobacco or cannabis). Data from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention have suggested that COVID-19 has a case fatality rate of 6.3% for individuals with chronic respiratory disease, compared with 2.3% overall. Comorbid chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, and other respiratory diseases, which are more frequent among chronic smokers and persons with other SUDs, have been shown to worsen prognosis with other coronaviruses, including those causing severe acute respiratory syndrome and Middle East respiratory syndrome.

Persons whose lungs may be compromised from vaping nicotine or tetrahydrocannabinol (or even just flavorings) may also be at risk. The highly publicized lung illnesses from vaping, including “popcorn lung” and e-cigarette or vaping product use–associated lung injury, warns professionals to the potential for lung injury from vaping, which is on the rise especially in young persons. Preclinical studies show that e-cigarette aerosols can damage lung tissue, cause inflammation, and diminish the lungs' ability to respond to infection.

Compromised lung function from COVID-19 could also put at risk those who have opioid use disorder (OUD) or methamphetamine and other psychostimulant use disorders. Chronic respiratory disease increases risk for fatal overdose in those who use opioids therapeutically. In addition, slowed breathing due to opioids causes hypoxemia, which can lead to cardiac, pulmonary, and brain complications and, if severe, can result in overdoses and death. At least 2 million persons in the United States have OUD, and more than 10 million misuse opioids; these individuals may be at increased risk for the most adverse consequences of COVID-19. Methamphetamine is a highly toxic drug that causes pulmonary damage, pulmonary hypertension, and cardiomyopathy, and its use has markedly increased in the United States; clinicians should be alert to the possibility of increased risk for adverse COVID-19 outcomes in methamphetamine users.

The Annals of Internal Medicine is an academic medical journal published by the American College of Physicians. It is one of the most widely cited and influential specialty medical journals in the world. Annals publishes content relevant to the field of internal medicine and related sub-specialties. For more information please visit www.acpjournals.org.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled. "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition. To learn more about COVID-19 or the Opioid Epidemic, visit these pages on SAFE's website at www.safeglencove.org.