

Information for local stop smoking services on the Stop Smoking London Helpline protocol for context specific COVID-19 and smoking cessation response.

COVID-19 is an infectious virus that affects the lungs and airways. There is some evidence that smokers are more likely to develop severe respiratory disease should they suffer from it –but this research is in its early days and reveals inconsistencies.

What we do know is that smoking tobacco damages the lungs and airways causing a range of severe respiratory problems and that smoking also harms the immune system. Expert advice remains that the best thing a smoker can do for their current and future health is to quit, and to quit now.

We know that stopping smoking is hard. Stop Smoking London alongside our stakeholders in the London boroughs have a key role to play to help smokers to quit at this time.

Stop Smoking London - Time to quit campaign

From April 2020 to March 2021, Stop Smoking London have run the “[Time to Quit](#)” campaign to support smokers to engage in a remote stop smoking journey.

The campaign encourages smokers to call the Stop Smoking London helpline or to visit the [Stop Smoking London website](#), to access local or regional stop smoking support.

Stop Smoking London – “How to quit smoking” guides

In 2020/21 Stop Smoking London produced a series of “[How to quit smoking](#)” guides. These are:

- “[How to quit smoking and stay calm in the process.](#)” This was produced in collaboration with the team at Good Thinking. This can be promoted locally across [social media](#).
- “[How to quit smoking and avoid weight gain.](#)” This has been developed with a London GP, Dr Emma Eade. Participating borough can now download and share the [social media pack](#) for this article.

- “[How to quit smoking by managing your tobacco withdrawal symptoms](#)”. This has been developed with Dr Andy McEwen, Chief Executive of the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT). Participating boroughs can now download and share the [social media posts](#) for this article.
- “[How to support your loved one to quit smoking.](#)” This has been developed with Susan Montgomery from the NCSCT. Participating boroughs can download and share the [social media posts](#) for this article.
- “[How to quit smoking this New Year.](#)” This has been developed with Dr Sarah Jackson, a behavioural scientist at University College London. Participating boroughs can download and share the [social media posts](#) for this article
- “[How to keep up your motivation to quit smoking.](#)” Stop Smoking London share the top three reasons Londoners tell us for quitting alongside some of their tips and ideas that have kept them going. Participating boroughs can now download and share the [social media posts](#) for this article.

Stop Smoking London “How to quit smoking” guides will also be shared with Heads of Internal Communication for sharing with their teams via [staff wellness](#) programmes.

Please check with callers to the helpline that do not live in London or one of the participating London boroughs to ascertain if [their workplace is in one of the London boroughs that offer local support to people who work in the borough](#). In this situation ensure these callers are appropriately signposted to the local service offer (see annex 2).

What can Stop Smoking London helpline advisors do at this time to support London smokers who call the helpline?

The Stop Smoking London helpline team have an important role to play in helping all London smokers to quit smoking at this time.

The Stop Smoking London helpline support is available for all eligible callers from London aged 12 and over.

The Stop Smoking London helpline team will provide the following to all callers to the helpline:

1. COVID-19 context-specific advice and support to help smokers to quit (see Annex 1).
2. Context specific advice and support around the Stop Smoking London How to quit guides.
3. Government advice on "[the Roadmap out of lockdown](#)". It is important that smokers understand to avoid areas where they may be exposed to COVID-19.
4. Offer advice and support on the use of NRT as per existing protocol.

Note: Most people are able to use NRT, including adults and children over 12 years of age – although children under 18 should not use the lozenges without getting medical advice first.

5. Smokers to the helpline should be encouraged to use alternative forms of nicotine, such as patches, gum, and e-cigarettes to help them quit, as these quitting aids have been shown to increase their likelihood of success.

Callers can be reassured that, it is the tar and carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke that is harmful, not nicotine which may even be beneficial.

6. Information on how to remotely purchase stop smoking aids like e-cigarettes and NRT should be provided.
7. Active encouragement to sign up to a quit journey at the time of the call, either through their local service or via the Stop Smoking London behavioural and motivational telephone support programme.
8. For callers who wish to use their local service, the caller should be advised that local services are now operating remotely and be signposted to the local service.

Note 1: the NCSCT has stated that all face-to-face stop smoking consultations cease immediately, and local services are now operating remotely. Further information can be found [here](#).

Note 2 :Some London boroughs provide smoking cessation local support to residents and also to those who work in the borough. Please ask callers who call the helpline who do not live in a participating borough which borough they

work in so these callers can access this local stop smoking service offer where applicable (see annex 2).

9. Callers may also be referred in to their local support by the helpline team using the call back request form that can be accessed from the Stop Smoking London website: <https://stopsmokinglondon.com/support-services>.
10. Specialist Stop Smoking London helpline advisors (tier 2) will initiate call back requests within 24 hours of receipt of the request.
11. For callers who wish to use their local service, the Stop Smoking London helpline team remind the smoker of the opening hours of the helpline so that out of standard office hours they can call the helpline to receive advice to help to keep them on track.
12. For callers who do not want to set a quit date at this time, the helpline team may refer them to the Stop Smoking London website: <https://stopsmokinglondon.com/>

The website includes context-specific advice to help smokers to quit as well as information about digital apps that can support a quit journey. Smokers who visit the website can be retargeted by Stop Smoking London with digital advertising to encourage and sustain their quit attempt.
13. The Stop Smoking London helpline team will ensure that all calls are handled in accordance to the existing PHE contract requirements in regard to the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, young people, and children.
14. The Stop Smoking London helpline team only provide COVID-19 context-specific advice to help smokers to quit. Callers to the helpline who are asking question about COVID-19 that is not directly related to smoking cessation will be referred to up to date information at:

NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/>

Gov.uk - <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Pregnant smokers can also be referred to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists website -

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>.

MECC Link for London - <https://www.mecclink.co.uk/london/>

What messages are we asking our partners in local boroughs to provide to their residents at this time about the Stop Smoking London remote services and campaign?

1. Together we can support Londoners to stop smoking, please use the “Time to Quit” campaign and resources pack locally.
2. Please if you have not already done so, include a link to the Stop Smoking London website www.stopsmokinglondon.com and Stop Smoking London helpline 0300 123 1044 on your local website.
3. Encourage your local smokers to call the Stop Smoking London helpline team for advice and support to keep them on track if they are struggling outside of local service opening hours. The Stop Smoking London helpline 0300 123 1044 is available seven days a week and at the following times:

Monday to Friday - 9am-8pm

Saturday and Sunday - 11am - 4pm

4. Please refer your local residents who will benefit from the remote support from Stop Smoking London into these services.
5. Please share the [Stop Smoking London – resources for your organisation](#). These have been designed to support you to help colleagues in your organisation who'd like to quit smoking.

Other than the Stop Smoking London helpline what other remote support does Stop Smoking London offer to support smokers in London to quit at this time?

The following two remote services are available for residents of participating boroughs (see annex 2 for the list of participating London boroughs).

Motivational text message support.

Receiving [motivational text messages](#) may help to keep smokers on track as they quit. Stop Smoking London has a tailored package of text messages to provide the information, support, motivation, and reminders that can help Londoners to successfully stop smoking for good.

This new remote service is available in English, Polish, Turkish, Romanian, and Urdu.

Stop Smoking London website.

The Stop Smoking London website is available in [English](#), [Polish](#), [Turkish](#), [Romanian](#) and [Urdu](#). These websites are all available with the accessible “Read Aloud” option.

The English version of the website no includes a [webchat function](#), allowing users to chat online with a Stop Smoking London helpline adviser.

Where can I find information to signpost people in London to local support for other better health and wellbeing services?

MECC Link is a simple online tool designed to provide health care professionals with resources to promote the wellbeing and resilience of their clients. The website provides easily accessible information on key healthy lifestyle topics, Very Brief Intervention (VBI) support based on suggested open questions using the Ask, Assist, Act model and information on a range of primary self-care tools and resources.

MECC Link also includes signposting information to a wide range of national and local health and wellbeing services. Local ‘front door’ support services are listed for all 33 London boroughs covering not only stop smoking but also mental health, substance misuse, COVID 19, healthy diet and healthy weight and physical activity.

Visit the website at <https://www.mecclink.co.uk/london/>

Annex 1

Questions and answers for callers - context-specific COVID-19 and smoking cessation.

Are smokers more at risk of getting COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious virus that attacks the lungs and airways. There is some evidence that smokers are more likely to develop severe respiratory disease should they suffer from it –but this research is in its early days and reveals inconsistencies.

What we do know is that smoking tobacco damages the lungs and airways causing a range of severe respiratory problems and that smoking also harms the immune system. We know that stopping smoking is hard, but quitting will help you to stay healthy and out of hospital. It may also reduce the risk of developing serious health problems should you get COVID-19.

Expert advice remains that the best thing a smoker can do for their current and future health is to quit, and to quit now.

It doesn't matter how long you've been smoking for or how many cigarettes you smoke a day, if you stop smoking now you will see immediate health benefits, including:

- Within 20 minutes your blood pressure drops to the level it was before the last cigarette.
- Within 8 hours the carbon monoxide levels in your blood return to normal.
- Within 2 weeks to 3 months your circulation improves and lung function increases.
- Within 1 to 9 months your lungs regain normal ciliary function, reducing infection risk.

Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme throughout your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

What about coronavirus and second-hand smoke?

COVID-19 is an infectious virus that attacks the lungs and airways. There is some evidence that smokers are more likely to develop severe respiratory disease should they suffer from it –but this research is in its early days and reveals inconsistencies.

What we do know is that smoking tobacco damages the lungs and airways causing a range of severe respiratory problems and that smoking also harms the immune system. We know that stopping smoking is hard, but quitting will help you to stay healthy and out of hospital. It may also reduce the risk of developing serious health problems should you get COVID-19.

When you stop smoking you will see immediate health benefits. You will also be protecting those around you from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke including children and those who are vulnerable.

We are here to help you throughout your stop smoking journey. Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme during your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

I am a pregnant smoker and want to stop smoking because of the coronavirus.

If you are planning or expecting a baby stopping smoking is one of the most important things you can do to help you have a healthy baby and a safe delivery.

For the latest information on coronavirus infection and pregnancy, visit the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists website at <https://www.rcog.org.uk>.

There is no safe level of smoking during pregnancy. The only way to reduce the risk of health problems for you and your baby is to stop completely. Expert advice remains that the best thing a smoker can do for their current and future health is to quit, and to quit now.

We are here to help you throughout your stop smoking journey. Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme during your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

Action: Follow protocols.**How can Stop Smoking London help me to stop smoking today?**

Eligible London callers can sign up to remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme over your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local support team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation.

When you sign up to this support, you will be called back by a specialist health advisor offering you regular expert one-to-one stop smoking support and advice over the phone at regular and agreed times. To start with this is for 28 days, however if you need support like this for longer we will be there for you.

Would you like to sign up for this support? Would you like to use the local remote service or the Stop Smoking London behavioural support?

Action: Follow protocols.**If no, I don't want to be part of a telephone behavioural support programme**

The Stop Smoking London website provides information about the range of help and support that is available to help you quit in London. After this call, you can visit this at: <https://stopsmokinglondon.com/>.

You can use the website to sign up to a tailored package of daily text messages that provide you with the information, support, motivation, and reminders that can help you to keep on track as you quit.

Action: Follow protocols.**I do not think I can stop smoking at this time, what can I do?**

It is important that you follow government guidance. You should avoid areas where you may be liable to be exposed to COVID-19.

The best thing for you to do is to quit smoking cigarettes now and to quit completely. If you can't quit totally, switch to vaping to cut down on the number of cigarettes you smoke. These are the most popular method of quitting smoking and recent evidence shows that they are effective in helping people to quit for good.

E-cigarettes can be purchased in vape stores or from online vape stores for delivery to your home address. The URL to find online vape stores is <https://www.findavapeshop.com/online-vaping-shops/>.

Using a stop smoking tool like e-cigarettes with a behavioural support programme means you are more likely to quit for good.

Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme over your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

How can I get Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help me quit at this time?

There are several NRT products for you to choose from like the patch and several oral NRT products. Using two different forms of NRT (usually the patch and one of the oral products) can be particularly helpful.

Most people are able to use NRT, but you should always read the packet or leaflet before using NRT to check whether it's suitable for you.

At this time when we are all being asked to follow social distancing measures, NRT can be purchased either in store at supermarkets and pharmacies or online from pharmacies and supermarkets for delivery to your home.

Using a stop smoking tool like NRT with a behavioural support programme means you are more likely to quit for good.

Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme over your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

How can I get e-cigarettes to help me quit at this time?

E-cigarettes (vapes) are the most popular method of quitting smoking and recent evidence shows that they are effective in helping people to quit for good.

At this time when we are all being asked to follow social distancing measures; e-cigarettes can be purchased in vape stores or from online vape stores for delivery to your home address. The URL to find online vape stores is <https://www.findavapeshop.com/online-vaping-shops/>.

Using a stop smoking tool like e-cigarettes with a behavioural support programme means you are more likely to quit for good.

Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme over your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

For callers who are eligible to take part in the Stop Smoking London telephone behavioural support and e-cigarette pilot please follow the agreed protocol.

For callers who are asking about quitting vaping at this time, please refer to annex 3.

Are vapers more at risk of getting COVID-19?

It is not known if you are more likely to get COVID-19 if you vape, or if you are more likely to become very ill if you are a vaper who gets COVID-19. However, the risk of severe illness is likely to be much less when vaping than if you smoke.

Vaping remains much less harmful than smoking and it is very important that you avoid returning to smoking.

What we do know is that when you vape your hand repeatedly goes near your mouth. This may be a way that COVID-19 can enter your body. To reduce your and other people's risk of COVID-19 infection it's recommended that you:

1. wash your hands more frequently than usual, for 20 seconds, with soap and water (or use hand sanitiser if soap is not available);
2. wash your hands in this way before and after you vape;
3. clean your vape devices regularly;

4. do not share vaping devices;
5. and, maintain space and do not exhale clouds of vapour around other people.

How can I get stop smoking prescription medication, like Champix, at this time?

Stop Smoking prescription only medication is available to people over the age of 18. However, to help stop the spread of COVID-19, it's important to avoid face-to-face medical help whenever possible.

You may be able to get a prescription for Champix (varenicline) at this time from your doctor. However, using combination NRT (nicotine patch + another 'faster acting' NRT product) is equally as effective as Champix (varenicline). NRT can be purchased in store or online from pharmacies and supermarkets.

Using a stop smoking tool like NRT with a behavioural support programme means you are more likely to quit for good.

Stop Smoking London provides a remote (over the phone) behavioural and motivation support programme over your quit journey. This is available from both the Stop Smoking London team and also in many cases from your local stop smoking team who are now operating remotely due to the current situation. Would you like to sign up to this today to help you to quit for good?

Where can I find information about local support in London for other better health and wellbeing services?

MECC Link for London includes signposting information to a wide range of national and local health and wellbeing services. Local 'front door' support services are listed for all 33 London boroughs covering not only stop smoking but also mental health, substance misuse, COVID 19, healthy diet and healthy weight and physical activity.

Visit the website at <https://www.mecclink.co.uk/london/>

Annex 2 Stop Smoking London Participating boroughs

The following London Boroughs commission the London Smoking Cessation Transformation Programme. All their residents age 12 and over can access Stop Smoking London services:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barking and Dagenham* • Barnet* • Bexley* • Brent • Bromley • Camden* • City of London* • Ealing • Enfield* • Greenwich* • Hammersmith and Fulham • Haringey* • Harrow* • Havering • Hounslow* • Islington* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kensington and Chelsea* • Kingston upon Thames* • Lambeth • Lewisham* • Merton* • Newham • Redbridge • Richmond upon Thames* • Sutton* • Tower Hamlets* • Waltham Forest* • Wandsworth* • Westminster
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*These London Boroughs offer local support to their residents and also to those who work in the borough.

The London Borough of Croydon, London Borough of Hillingdon, London Borough of Southwark, London Borough of Hackney do not currently participate.

Annex 3

How to manage a caller who is asking for help to stop vaping at this time?

It is important to note that we do not want people to feel they should stop vaping and then end up relapsing back into smoking. Please follow the below steps to manage this conversation:

1. Check the client's reason for wanting to stop vaping as it could be because of inaccurate reports about the 'dangers of vaping'. In this scenario please

provide accurate information and reassurance as required based on existing protocol.

2. If the client is concerned about the cost, being dependent upon vaping or the long-term consequences AND they are not worried about returning to smoking then they can:
 - a) reduce the nicotine strength of their e-liquid every week (24mg-18mg-12mg-6mg) or,
 - b) extend the time between vaping (e.g. twice an hour becomes once an hour) each week.
3. Inform the client that if at any point they think that they are at risk of returning to smoking they should resume vaping.