



Voice and friend of the smoker

News & Comment

Headlines>Forest Ireland: Now is NOT the time to lecture smokers and vapers about their lifestyle

Forest Ireland: Now is NOT the time to lecture smokers and vapers about their lifestyle

🕒 Fri 17th April, 2020

John Mallon, spokesman for Forest Ireland, has responded to an article in the Irish Times by Professor Luke Clancy, director general of TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland and former chairman of ASH Ireland.

According to Prof Clancy, 'Covid-19 is changing our lives, maybe for ever, and remarkable efforts are being made to save people's lives. Action on smoking and vaping cessation must become part of these efforts because, already, data clearly show the influence of smoking on the disease caused by Covid-19.'

'The message,' he added, 'is clear. Smoking is an avoidable risk factor for a poorer prognosis in Covid-19 infection, including death. Stopping smoking is an intervention that can help. Access to personal protective equipment (PPE), ICU capacity, and mechanical ventilation are the ultimate scarce resources, and interventions which can make a difference when the small percentage of very severe cases arrive in hospital. There is very little we know that can be changed which can reduce demand for ICU beds except stopping smoking.'

'Now is an ideal time to make a national effort at smoking cessation and treatment of nicotine dependence. Many smokers, like everyone else, are off work, are willing and, if informed, anxious to stop smoking. They are also more likely to do it knowing it will help save their lives, not just in the long term but now. They should know and be reminded that they will also help others by reducing demand for scarce resources.'

'We must strongly encourage smoking cessation and vaping cessation and provide a national treatment plan, free of charge, for all smokers and vapers and do it now. It is the best time ever to take Irish Government policy on the tobacco endgame seriously and go for it.'

In a letter to the editor of the Irish Times, submitted on April 8 and again on April 10, Mallon wrote:

Sir, – Contrary to Professor Luke Clancy's belief that 'Now is the time to give up smoking and vaping' (Opinion, April 7th), smoking or vaping may be one of the few pleasures left to smokers or ex-smokers who are stressed or isolated at home, so now is not the time to lecture them about their lifestyle.

Moreover, cherry picking studies that suggest that smokers are at greater risk of severe respiratory disease from Covid-19 is tantamount to scaremongering. The truth is, it is not at all clear that smokers are at increased risk of developing Covid-19 specifically, that their symptoms are worse, or that their prognoses are different to non-

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smokers.

In a preliminary meta-analysis published in the European Journal of Internal Medicine the authors conclude that, based on 1399 Chinese patients, "active smoking does not apparently seem to be significantly associated with enhanced risk of progressing towards severe disease in Covid-19." Likewise a preliminary study of 7074 patients with Covid-19 in America found that only 96 (1.3 per cent) were current smokers, and only 165 (2.3 per cent) were former smokers.

The country is facing a genuine public health emergency. Let's focus on that, not nannying folk to give up a legal habit many people enjoy.

JOHN MALLON,
Forest Ireland,
Churchfield,
Cork.

See: [Do you smoke or vape? Here's why Covid-19 means you should quit right now](#) (Irish Times, April 7, 2020)

Note: As of today's date (April 17, 2020), Mallon's letter had not been published.

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