

Script – Print - Fanning the Flames of COVID in Young Adults

Smoking, Obesity, Hypertension Can Lead to Severe Symptoms

Here's another reason to stop smoking.

A recent study from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) has found that 1 in 3 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 are prone to contracting a severe form of COVID-19 requiring hospitalization.

The [study](#) published in the "Journal of Adolescent Health," found that smoking, including cigarettes and e-cigarettes, contributes to the group's increased risk.

But it's not just smoking that is putting young adults in harm's way. Obesity, asthma, diabetes, and immune disorders often add to young people's risk of getting severely ill with COVID-19.

"When you get an infection and you have health problems already it just amplifies the disease and the problems you develop when you get sick," said Dr. Leonardo Lopez, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare. "What you want to focus on is living healthy, so if you're obese you want to lose weight. (With) Diabetes you want to take care of the disease and see your doctor regularly and when you smoke you want to quit smoking."

The University of California study reviewed data from more than 8,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. They studied how many people in the group had risk factors for COVID-19, including diabetes, obesity, heart conditions, or if they smoked. The result? Thirty two percent of the group was at risk for the disease, which was heavily influenced by cigarette and e-cigarette smoking.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2019, about 12 of every 100 middle school students (12.5 percent) and about 31 of every 100 high students (31.2 percent) reported they are currently using a tobacco product.

The CDC reports that if cigarette smoking continues at the current rate among young people, 5.6 million of today's Americans younger than 18 will die early from a smoking-related illness. That's nearly 1 of every 13 Americans 17 years or younger who are alive today.

"The first thing to do is don't even start," said Dr. Leonardo Lopez, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare. "I would really like to emphasize that. If everyone who smoked could quit they would, but it's very difficult. There are treatments and medications that can help increase your chances of quitting smoking and there are other behavioral therapies that have been successful."

Scientists continue to discover new aspects of COVID-19 every day. That's why, according to Dr. Lopez, it's important to continue wearing a mask, maintaining social distance and washing your hands.

“There’s a lot about the virus we’re still learning about and there seems to be some secondary effects to the virus,” said Dr. Leonardo Lopez, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare. “It affects a variety of people with a spectrum of symptoms. Some people are asymptomatic and don’t realize they have the infection and that’s why we worry about wearing a mask even when you’re feeling well because we don’t want to spread disease.”

That’s an important lesson for people of all ages, but especially for young adults.

“There is a tendency when you’re younger to think that you’ll take care of it later,” said Dr. Leonardo Lopez, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare. “But it really is cumulative. These things add up with time so you want to have a good start to a healthy life.”

For more information on smoking cessation programs, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).