



# Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Cigarette Smoker's Mental and Physical Health

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## Short Communication

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the first known use of the term "Lockdown" in 1973 means "the confinement of prisoners to their cells for all or most of the day as a temporary security measure". COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by World Health Organization on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Following which, most of the countries have imposed lockdown to reduce the rate of transmission of the virus causing COVID-19. Lockdown imposes restrictions on movements and people are asked to stay inside the home. Only essential items are allowed to be sold and bought. Most of the countries are under total or partial lockdown for more than fourteen days. Data for the graph below were collected from multiple sources [1] (Figure 1).

Italy, Denmark, El Salvador, Ireland and Norway are under lockdown for almost 40 days.

During lockdown, items like cigarettes are not available freely and easily. Due to which most of the smokers have to reduce their number of cigarettes smoked per day. So, this unintentional and unplanned reduction or cessation of smoking for some people, made them go through the phases of nicotine withdrawal. The Figure 2 shows average cigarette consumption per smoker per day in different countries [2]. There are few countries where more than 35 to 45 cigarettes are being smoked per smoker per day (Figure 2).

Throughout the globe, nicotine is the most widely abused substance. The use of nicotine stimulates the brain to give pleasurable feelings. But in the case of cessation of use, the level of nicotine in blood drops and the craving occurs. When there is a decreased or complete stoppage in tobacco use, withdrawal symptoms can be noticed. There will be a decrease in arousal and profound change in mood as well as social interactions. Whereas the symptoms can vary depending on the social support they get. The most common reported feedback to cigarette withdrawal is the urge to smoke. This urge can be made worse when a person is feeling bored and is stressed whereas it can be made better when they find themselves occupied [3]. According to DSM-V, symptoms like feeling irritable, angry, difficult to concentrate, restless, trouble sleeping, anxious and increased appetite can be noticed when tobacco use has been abruptly discontinued or reduced. Out of that, four are seen to be experienced in the first 24 h.

In a study [4], even a decrease in heart rate and changes in blood pressure were noticed during the withdrawal period. Symptoms like craving, anger, difficulty concentrating, anxiety, hunger, impatience and/or restlessness return to the pre-cessation state by one month except some like hunger, weight gain and craving continue for six months [5]. Craving was noticed frequently or daily by 45% whereas the figure of 66% was noticed among those who smoked >15 cigarettes per day [6]. It had been found that symptoms were noticed as earliest as 30 min of abstinence [7]. Over 21 days of abstinence, various symptoms of withdrawal can be noticed [8].

Around 74% of smokers are willing to quit smoking but only a few of them get success [9]. Quitting smoking will be difficult to achieve in the circumstances like COVID-19 pandemic where everyone is stressed out of staying inside the home as well as fear of getting infected. We are bombarded with news of deaths due to COVID-19 around the globe and such news raises our stress level to the maximum. Smokers in such conditions will crave for smoking to ease themselves. But due to the unavailability of cigarettes they will have to deal with withdrawal symptoms too. Such a stressed person might show violent behavior towards their family. As in the lockdown people stay at home all the time, the risk of domestic violence might increase.

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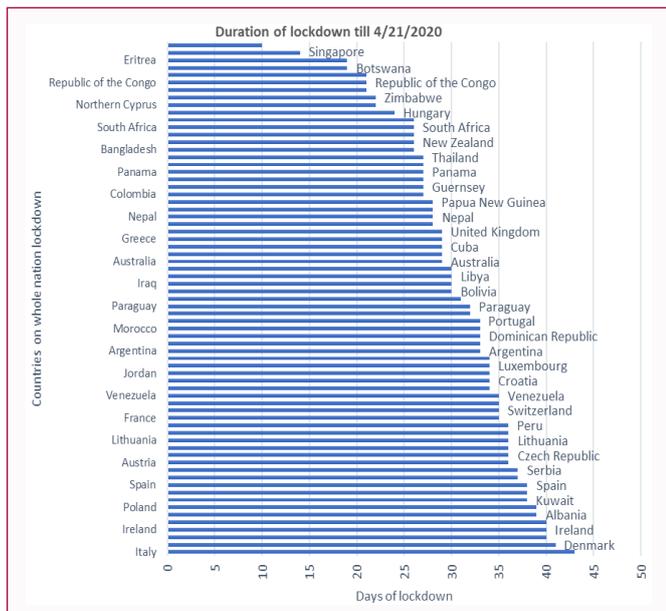


Figure 1: Duration of lockdown in various countries till April-21-2020.

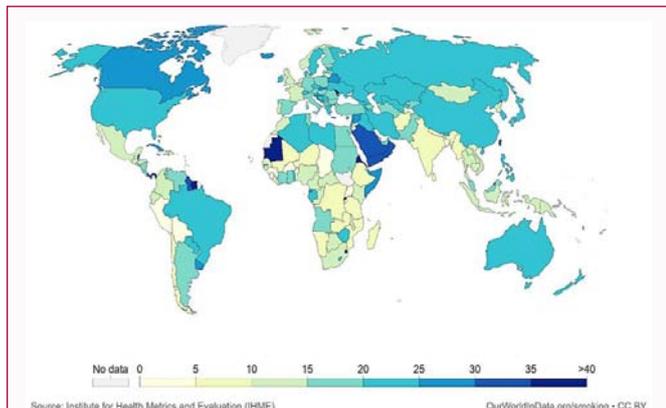


Figure 2: Average cigarette consumption per smoker per day, 2012 (source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2012).

But with the proper guidance and family support this lockdown might be a good opportunity for them to quit smoking. In this time, online smoking cessation programs and counseling will play a vital role in the prevention of smoking relapse. Not only this will help smokers in handling emotions but also make their lockdown easier. Such people have the opportunity to get something good out of this pain and suffering caused by COVID-19.

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