

## Quitting Smoking and Vaping During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Shahnaz Fatteh, MD  
Special to the FMA

At this time, all of us are very vigilant about protecting ourselves from the COVID-19 virus. Yet, tobacco smoking still remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in our society, and there has never been a greater need for smokers to seek the help they need in quitting tobacco use or vaping than during this pandemic.

Medical experts from the American Lung Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization agree in highlighting this urgent need. As Brian Christman, MD, Professor of Medicine at Vanderbilt University and volunteer spokesman for the American Lung Association, stated in an interview with CNN (posted April 3, 2020 on CNN.com), “Every lung doctor in America will be preaching that everyone should quit smoking. ... You may already be practicing social distancing, washing your hands frequently, and avoiding touching your face. In addition to all these, limiting or quitting smoking is yet another important aspect of your anti-coronavirus arsenal.”

Quitting smoking tobacco or electronic cigarettes can reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection through less frequent hand-to-mouth contact. It can also offer smokers the opportunity to build up their defenses in case they contract COVID-19, such as through improved lung function and removal of mucous buildup, reduced chronic inflammation and stronger immune system capacity, and improved circulatory and cardiac health — all of which are vital in overcoming COVID-19 disease.

As people practice social distancing, the [Area Health Education Centers \(AHEC\)](#) throughout Florida now offer free virtual online smoking cessation group classes at multiple times during the week using accessible, easy-to-use web-based teleconferencing technology. These virtual classes are provided in the same interactive, friendly, respectful and supportive atmosphere that has been a hallmark of AHEC’s community tobacco cessation services for over a decade.

These services are a major program of Tobacco Free Florida’s “Quit Your Way” and consist of well-proven, evidence-based curricula provided by highly trained Tobacco Treatment Specialists for free to all Floridians who smoke or vape. Participants may receive free workbooks, materials, and over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy such as patches, gums, and lozenges.

The FMA urges everyone to share this information with patients, family, friends, colleagues and others who smoke. Together, we can play an extremely important role during this major public health crisis by safeguarding the lives of countless Floridians who need to stop smoking or vaping now.

**For details about the free AHEC virtual smoking cessation services in your area, call (877) 848-6696 or visit [www.ahectobacco.com](http://www.ahectobacco.com).**

*Shahnaz Fatteh, MD, is a Board-certified asthma, allergy, and immunology specialist. She practices with Asthma, Allergy Care Center of Florida, which serves patients at two locations in Broward County.*