



National Indian Health Board

NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Risk of COVID-19 Infection for Commercial Tobacco Smokers

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have the highest rate of cigarette smoking compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Commercial tobacco used in cigarettes often contains other chemicals in addition to nicotine that are toxic and can lead to respiratory diseases and heart disease, as well as other related diseases. AI/AN smokers may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to fingers coming into contact with lips, which increases the possibility of transmission of virus from hand to mouth. Additionally, some smokers may have lung disease or reduced lung capacity, which can greatly increase risk of serious illness should they become infected with COVID-19. For more information about how to protect your Tribal community, please visit the [National Indian Health Board COVID-19 Tribal Resource Center](#).



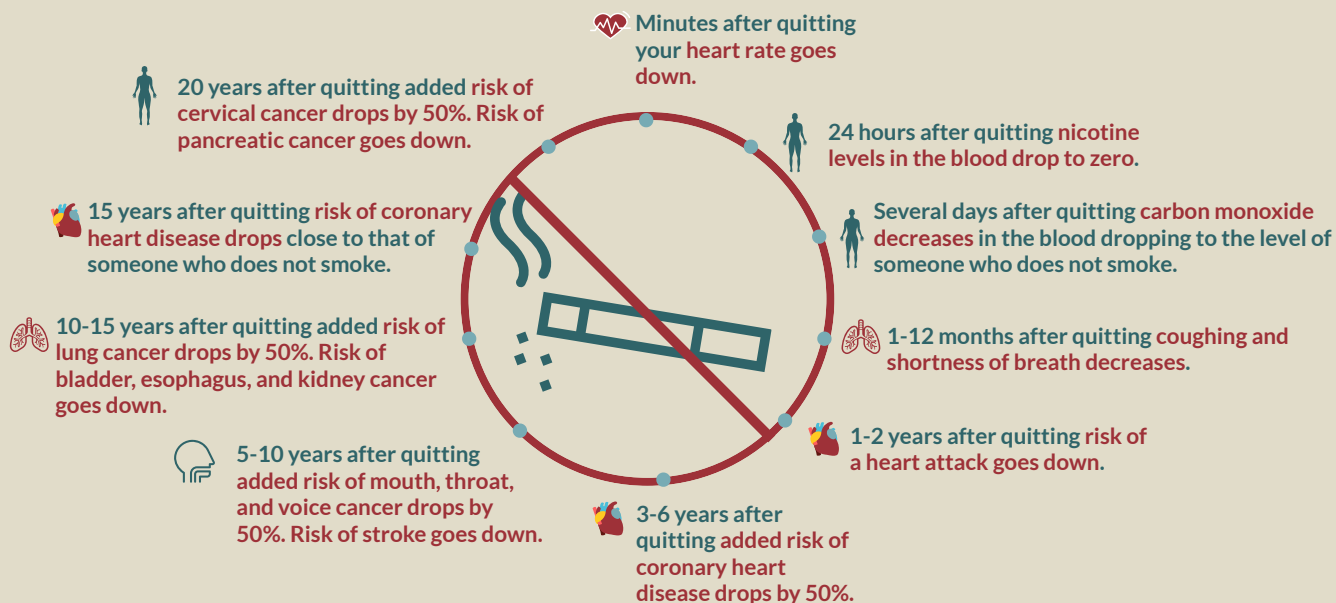
Impact of Commercial Tobacco on Your Body

- American Indians and Alaska Natives who smoke commercial tobacco products may be at an increased risk for or have harder time recovering from respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19.
- Cigarette smoking can reduce or suppress your immune system and cause heart and lung diseases.
- Conditions that increase oxygen needs or reduce the ability of the body to use it properly will put patients at higher risk of serious lung conditions such as pneumonia.



Benefits of Quitting Commercial Tobacco

Nicotine is the primary addictive substance in commercial tobacco. Over time the body can adapt to nicotine causing commercial tobacco addiction. Six (6) of the 10 leading causes of death among AI/ANs have been linked to smoking commercial tobacco. Quitting commercial tobacco can benefit your body within minutes.



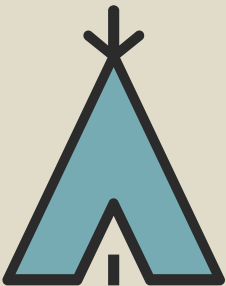
Commercial Tobacco vs Traditional Tobacco

Traditional and commercial tobacco are different in the way that they are planted, grown, harvested, prepared, and used. Traditional tobacco has been used in sacred ways by American Indians for centuries. Its use differs by Tribe, with Alaska Natives generally not using traditional tobacco at all.

Commercial tobacco is produced for recreational use by companies, contains chemical additives, and is linked with death and disease. Commercial tobacco is mass-produced and sold for profit. It is sometimes used, incorrectly, in place of traditional tobacco for ceremonies.

Traditional tobacco has been used by American Indian Tribes for centuries as a medicine with cultural and spiritual importance. Many Tribes maintain teachings and stories on the origin of tobacco. These teachings address tobacco in its purest form, known today as *Nicotiana rustica*, and may include mixtures of other native plants. Traditional tobacco preparation and use varies across Tribes and regions. These variances are due to the many different teachings among Tribes of North America.

The care and respect involved in the preparation and use of traditional tobacco are part of years of tradition that connects today's Tribal youth, adults, and elders with those of generations ago. Continued use of traditional tobacco supports a good life and healthy community today and for future generations to come.



Help Quitting Commercial Tobacco



There are several resources for AI/ANs that are interested in quitting commercial tobacco.

- American Indian Commercial Tobacco Program (AICTP) - 1-855-372-0037
- Indian Health Service (IHS) mobile messaging - Text the word NATIVE to 47848. You will take a short survey before receiving messages
- Keep it Sacred National Native Network
- 1-800-QUITNOW or visit www.cdc.gov/quit

Learn More About Traditional Tobacco



There are several resources for AI/AN and non-Native individuals that are interested in learning more about traditional tobacco:

- Keep it Sacred - <https://keepitsacred.itcmi.org/tobacco-and-tradition/traditional-tobacco-use/>
- ClearWay Minnesota - <http://clearwaymn.org/keepitobaccosacred/>
- National Native Network (video) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fyexo0Tyv9g>
- Native American Cancer Initiatives, Inc - <https://natamcancer.org/>

For more information, or to learn more about frequently asked questions, visit the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/>



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For more information, visit NIHB's National Tribal COVID-19 Response page at www.nihb.org