

World No Tobacco Day 2021
Message of WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti

On 31 May, the international community commemorates World No Tobacco Day to remind everyone that tobacco kills half of its users. Every year, around 1.2 million non-smokers die from exposure to tobacco smoke.

Tobacco use harms nearly every organ in the human body. Even smoking one cigarette a day can seriously harm a person's health. Tobacco use can lead to lung, mouth, throat, oesophagus, stomach, bowel and other cancers. It increases the risk of chest and lung infections, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other conditions. There is no safe form of tobacco.

The theme this year is "Commit to quit" because the choice to stop tobacco use is in our hands. Millions of people have been motivated to quit tobacco during the COVID-19 pandemic because of evidence showing tobacco smoking impairs lung function, making it harder for the body to fight off coronaviruses and other diseases.

Of the 1.3 billion tobacco users globally, 60% have expressed the desire to quit but only 30% have access to the tools to do so successfully. Digital solutions can help to fill this gap and so at WHO we have introduced ["Florence" a digital health worker](#) who gives brief advice on how to quit and links people with the tools and solutions that can help.

More than 75 million people in the African Region use some form of tobacco. This burden is likely to increase as consumer purchasing power improves coupled with intensive efforts by the tobacco industry to expand the African market. Public health advocates should therefore actively pursue counter-marketing campaigns that highlight the many risks of tobacco use.

As WHO, we are supporting countries to scale-up programmes to help people quit tobacco, especially at the primary health care and community levels. So far support to quit is available in primary health care facilities in 11 countries¹ and in Angola, Botswana and Zambia these services are offered at no cost to consumers. National toll-free lines where tobacco users can call and get advice are available in six countries.² Nicotine replacement therapy is sold in pharmacies in 19 countries³ with governments fully covering the costs in Eswatini, Mauritius and Seychelles. Nicotine replacement therapy is included in the essential medicines list in Algeria, Ethiopia and South Africa. Burkina Faso is implementing "mTobaccoCessation," a mobile text messaging-based solution.

This promising progress now needs to be expanded to more countries in the WHO African Region. Governments and communities should also be alert to industry tactics to attract new

¹ Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal and Zambia.

² Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mauritius, Senegal and South Africa.

³ Algeria, Botswana, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

users and keep people using tobacco, even when they are trying to quit. Products such as electronic cigarettes and nicotine pouches are highly addictive and not recommended as strategies to reduce tobacco use.

As WHO, we remain committed to supporting Member States to meet their obligations under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. These include the development and implementation of programmes to promote quitting tobacco in schools, universities, health facilities, workplaces and sporting environments. Services to diagnose tobacco dependence and help people quit, should be included as an integral component in national health and education programmes, plans and strategies.

I call on governments to improve access to these services, using a combination of approaches, such as toll-free quit lines, nicotine replacement therapy (such as gum, patches, sprays and other products), and digital solutions to empower people to quit. These interventions can be phased in where resources are limited.

Together, let's support people with the tools and resources needed to successfully quit and to reduce the demand for tobacco. This will save lives, save money and create healthier societies.

Learn more:

[World No Tobacco Day campaign](#)

[Using AI to quit tobacco](#)

[New products, old tricks? Concerns big tobacco is targeting youngsters](#) (e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches etc)

[WHO Scientific Brief: Smoking and COVID-19](#)

[A guide for tobacco users to quit](#)

[WHO Report on the global tobacco epidemic 2019: offer help to quit tobacco use](#)

[Goodchild M et al. Global economic cost of smoking-attributable diseases, *Tob Control* 2018;27:58–64. doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2016-053305](#)

[Tobacco and its environmental impact: an overview, WHO, 2017](#)