

Was COVID-19 associated with increased cigarette purchasing, consumption, and smoking at home among US smokers in early 2020? Findings from the US arm of the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Smoking and Vaping Survey

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Abstract

Evidence of the impact of COVID-19 and mandatory stay-at-home orders on cigarette smoking is mixed. In the United States, household tobacco purchases increased in early 2020, but it is unclear whether this was associated with increased smoking. Using individual-level, longitudinal data from a representative cohort of US smokers (n = 3046), this study tested whether (1) carton purchases of cigarettes increased in early 2020 relative to the same calendar period in 2018, (2) more smokers permitted smoking inside their homes, and (3) smokers increased the number of cigarettes they smoked per day. Weighted multivariable logistic regression tested whether trends in carton purchasing and smoke-free homes differed in 2020 compared to 2018 while weighted multivariable linear regression tested whether trends in cigarette consumption differed in 2020 compared to 2018. Overall, 24.0% of US smokers last purchased cigarettes by the carton in early 2018; this increased to 28.8% in early 2020 ($p = 0.007$). Average daily cigarette consumption and the percentage of smokers reporting that smoking was not allowed inside their homes did not differ between 2018 and 2020 ($p = 0.92$ and $p = 0.054$, respectively). Overall, these findings suggest that COVID-19 mitigation measures implemented in the spring of 2020 had limited impact on the smoking behavior of US adult smokers.

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