



*Italian Society of Tobaccology*

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## **Smokers most at risk for infection and complications from Coronavirus**

The Coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19), which is sowing mourning, suffering and panic across the world, presents various points of view, through which to interpret it. Covid-19, that spared children that are generally considered a biologically vulnerable group, seems to pose a particular threat to middle-aged and old adults, especially men with cardio-respiratory diseases.

From Chinese data, the first thing you notice is the gender disparity in the mortality rate. Indeed, although men and women have been infected in nearly equal numbers, researchers found that the mortality rate among men is double that that recorded in women, 2.8 vs 1.7, respectively. Why?

Numerous factors can promote respiratory viral infections, including the current epidemic, such as bio-genetic factors (immuno-protective actions of estrogens for women) or lifestyles.

Lifestyles, which differ in gender, especially in China, may have an impact on the health status, play a role in responses to infections, and may condition the onset of diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancers and heart disease. "*The fil-rouge which combines smoking-related diseases*", says Dr. Vincenzo Zagà, pulmonologist, president of the Italian Society of Tobaccology, "*is undoubtedly tobacco smoke.*"

This is confirmed by the fact that China has the largest smoking population in the world, with 316 million smokers, who represent almost a third of smokers in the world. Moreover, China records 40% of worldwide tobacco consumption, with an average consumption of 22 cigarettes per day. Smoking prevalence among women is very low compared to men (1.8% vs 47.6%), with one million smoking-related deaths per year.

Analyzes carried out by researchers in China and in the United States show that men are more likely to be infected with COVID-19, to have more severe symptoms, such as pneumonia, and to experience a fatal outcome. In addition, recent studies from China have shown that smokers have a significantly higher risk of developing a severe form of Covid-19 pneumonia.

*"Therefore," concludes Zagà, "for smokers it is absolutely imperative to quit to limit damages".*

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