

Covid-19, containment and addictions

Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine

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In this time of lengthy containment, loneliness, sense of isolation, boredom or idleness nurture addictive behaviours and worsen tobacco dependence of vulnerable people on tobacco, alcohol, other drugs, screens, games of money and chance.

Every year in France, tobacco causes 75,000 deaths and alcohol 41,000 without counting the many disabilities and chronic diseases affecting millions of consumers. With 4 to 5 million alcohol addicts, 13 million tobacco smokers and a million and a half of cannabis users, France is among the European countries one of the most exposed to the risks of aggravation linked to containment.

Forced cohabitation in limited home spaces expose to passive smoking, which causes 880,000 victims worldwide each year, including 3,000 in France. The smoker's pre-existing lung damage makes him/her more vulnerable to attack by Sars-CoV-2 [1]. In case of declared infection, any consumption of inhaled products (tobacco, cannabis, cocaine...) seems to increase the risk of a severe form of the disease [2].

The conditions of confinement at home favour conjugal and intra-family violence, as well as domestic accidents, particularly in the case of acute alcohol abuse. In people suffering from chronic psychiatric conditions, the interruption of the medical follow-up can settle a state of decompensation settle with an increased use of alcohol and drugs [3].

The National Academy of Medicine recommends:

1. to widely disseminate telephone call numbers to inform the population about the possibilities of helping people at risk of addiction;
2. to raise awareness of health and social-medical professionals of the risk of interrupting care for people followed by an addictive pathology;
3. not to interrupt the activities of the medico-social structures specialized in addictology in their actions aimed at reducing the risks associated with drug use;
4. not to expect tobacco to have a hypothetical protective effect against Covid-19, but to consider the very real risks linked to its consumption in confined areas, by the smoker himself, and around him, for children, pregnant women, the sick and the elderly.

[1] World Health Organization. Tobacco Free initiative: Tobacco and waterpipe use increases the risk of suffering from COVID-19. www.emro.who.int/tfi/know-the-truth/tobacco-and-waterpipe-users-are-at-increased-risk-of-covid-19-infection.html

[2] http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/topic-overviews/covid-19-and-people-who-use-drugs_en

[3] Covid-19 and Psychiatry, Communiqué of the French National Academy of Medicine, 17 April 2020.