



-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

Dr. Schmetterer Reviews Link Between COVID-19 and Smoking

(SALEM, OHIO) – April 21, 2020– “As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases continues to rise, we have seen more severe symptoms among those with underlying health concerns,” explained Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeon Lawrence Schmetterer, M.D., FACS; member of Salem Regional Medical Center’s medical staff.

“COVID-19 affects the lungs, causing flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath. Those who smoke or vape may be more susceptible to COVID-19 because they may already have lung disease or inflammation in their airways that can weaken their ability to defend against bacteria and viruses.”

“Smoking tobacco, marijuana or vaping paralyzes the cilia in the lungs. These tiny, hair-like structures help fight off infection and clear mucus and debris out of the lungs. When the cilia are damaged or destroyed, a person’s risk of developing pneumonia or other respiratory infections increases. The good news is that the cilia are one of the first parts of the lungs to heal when a person stops smoking.”

A recent study published by the New England Journal of Medicine found that people who smoke were over two times more likely to have severe symptoms from COVID-19 compared to those who did not smoke.

Dr. Schmetterer noted that even the act of smoking- by putting an object in your mouth with your hands- introduces virus particles into the mucus membranes of your mouth.

Smokers may also be more prone to severe COVID-19 infections, in part, because their lungs contain an abundance of entry points that the virus can exploit. COVID-19 infections begin at the ACE2 receptors, which are proteins found throughout the body on the surfaces of cells, including in the upper and lower respiratory tracts.

“In a healthy person, these proteins help with the regulation of blood pressure and other functions of the body,” Dr. Schmetterer added. “However, COVID-19 has the ability to plug into the ACE2 receptor in order to inject its genetic material into the cells, reproduce and then spread throughout the body.”

New research suggests that lungs exposed to cigarette smoke accumulate abnormally large numbers of ACE2 receptors, which may increase the ability of the COVID-19 virus to enter the lungs.

“Unlike more common respiratory viruses, COVID-19 can also cause extensive damage to the cells in the lung wall and lining of the air sacs,” Dr. Schmetterer advised. “As the

body reacts to this infection, it releases an inflammatory response that causes the lungs to become even more inflamed and filled with fluid. This process can then lead to severe pneumonia or acute respiratory distress.”

“Quitting smoking or vaping may help lower the risk of developing more serious COVID-19 symptoms. People who vape or smoke may not be as aware of the damage they are doing to their lungs until their ability to fight off an infection is compromised. Stopping smoking and vaping may be the single best decision you can make right now to help fight off this disease.”

Dr. Schmetterer’s office is located at 790 Boardman-Canfield Road in Boardman, and he has a weekly clinic at Salem Regional Medical Center. He can be reached at 330-743-3604.