

# Live Well: Smoking and Respiratory Health – COPD and Asthma

## Key Messages:

Over 26,700 adults in Merton smoke. Smoking is the leading preventable cause of illness and premature death, causing a range of serious health conditions, including cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses such as COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and a long-term smoker has, on average, a life expectancy about 10 years less than a non-smoker. People living in lower socio-economic groups, those with mental health illness and those working in routine and manual roles have significantly higher rates of smoking and tobacco use and disproportionate ill health.

## Introduction:

Tobacco use is a major risk factor for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, causing over 20 different types of cancer: lung (72%); mouth, throat and sinus (60-77%); bladder and kidney cancer(34%); and many other debilitating health conditions<sup>1</sup>. The impact of smoking and tobacco use, and the associated health harms and diseases attributed to smoking, are much higher in communities most affected by health inequalities. On average, in 2023, smokers in England, spent £2,451 on tobacco, comparable to the energy price guarantee of £2,500 and 11% of the £22,213 gross disposable household income per head<sup>2</sup>.

In 2022-23, one in six (16%) of all hospital admissions in England, were for respiratory diseases where smoking was the most likely contributing factor ,while it also caused 8% of all admissions for cancers and 7% of admissions for cardiovascular diseases<sup>3</sup>.

Among adults, vaping prevalence in England has been steadily increasing: 8.3% in 2022, up from 7.1% in 2021 and 6.3% in 2020. Vaping is a recommended method to give up smoking, for adults, with significantly fewer health harms than cigarette smoking. Tobacco smoke is one the leading causes of asthma. People living in areas of higher deprivation are more likely to experience asthma due to higher exposure levels<sup>4</sup>. In England, the prevalence of COPD shows notable differences between genders. Approximately 3.9% of men and 2.4% of women over the age of 15 are affected by COPD. This disparity is even more pronounced in those aged 45+, with 6.8% of men and 3.9% of women diagnosed with the condition. These differences can be attributed to various factors, including smoking habits and occupational exposures.

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## Identifying Priorities:

- Addressing smoking is crucial for improving public health and reducing health disparities in England.
- Ensure that all system partners work together to raise awareness off the health-harms associated with smoking and tobacco use to ensure the rate of people taking up smoking is reduced.
- Raise awareness of the benefits of alternatives to tobacco use, such as vaping.
- Embedding prevention into clinical and care pathways

## Local Picture:

Merton has an overall smoking prevalence rate of 12.4% (adults aged 18+) which is lower than the rates for London (14.97%) and England (13.58%). It is estimated that there are over 26,700 people in the borough who smoke (2022/23). As with trends across London and England this had shown a steady decline from 2015 -2018, but rates have started to rise again with a slight drop during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Smoking and other types of smokeless tobacco (shisha, betel, bidis, paan) are popular with many people from South Asian communities, and its use is much higher in the areas to the east of the borough, which also has higher levels of deprivation and other associated health inequalities: higher rates of social housing and people employed in routine and manual roles e.g., sales, production, transport, hospitality, care workers and construction. Those Merton residents who work in routine and manual jobs are much more likely to be people who smoke, 22.45% compared to the overall rate of 12.4%. Adult residents with a mental health illness are also more likely to smoke. Nearly 27% of people with mental health illness in Merton are recorded as smoking. In 2022, smoking was estimated to cause around 143 deaths annually in the borough.

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## Local Picture (continued):

In Merton, the prevalence of smoking during pregnancy is relatively low. The latest available data, shows that 5.2% of pregnant women were known to be smokers at the time of delivery. This is significantly lower than the national average in England, which stands at around 8.8%.

Recorded COPD prevalence is significantly higher in the Primary Care Networks (PCN) located to the east on the borough: Morden PCN (1.3%) East Merton PCN (1.2%) compared to North-West Merton PCN (0.6%) There is a similar trend for the PCN's with the highest prevalence of asthma (age 6+), being located to the east of the borough in areas with higher social needs.

**For more data on Smoking and Respiratory Health, please see the Live Well Dashboards here: [Live Well](#)**

## Further Information:

- [Smoking and tobacco: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Cancer risk statistics | Cancer Research UK \(cancerresearchuk.org\)](#)
- [Stopping the start: our new plan to create a smokefree generation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## References:

1. [Smoking-and-Cancer-Fact-Sheet.pdf \(ash.org.uk\)](#)
2. [The economic impact of smoking - ASH \(ash.org.uk\)](#)
3. [Hospital admissions due to smoking up nearly 5% last year, NHS data shows \(clinicalservicesjournal.com\)](#)
4. [Smoking Profile - Smoking and inequalities | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care \(phe.org.uk\)](#)