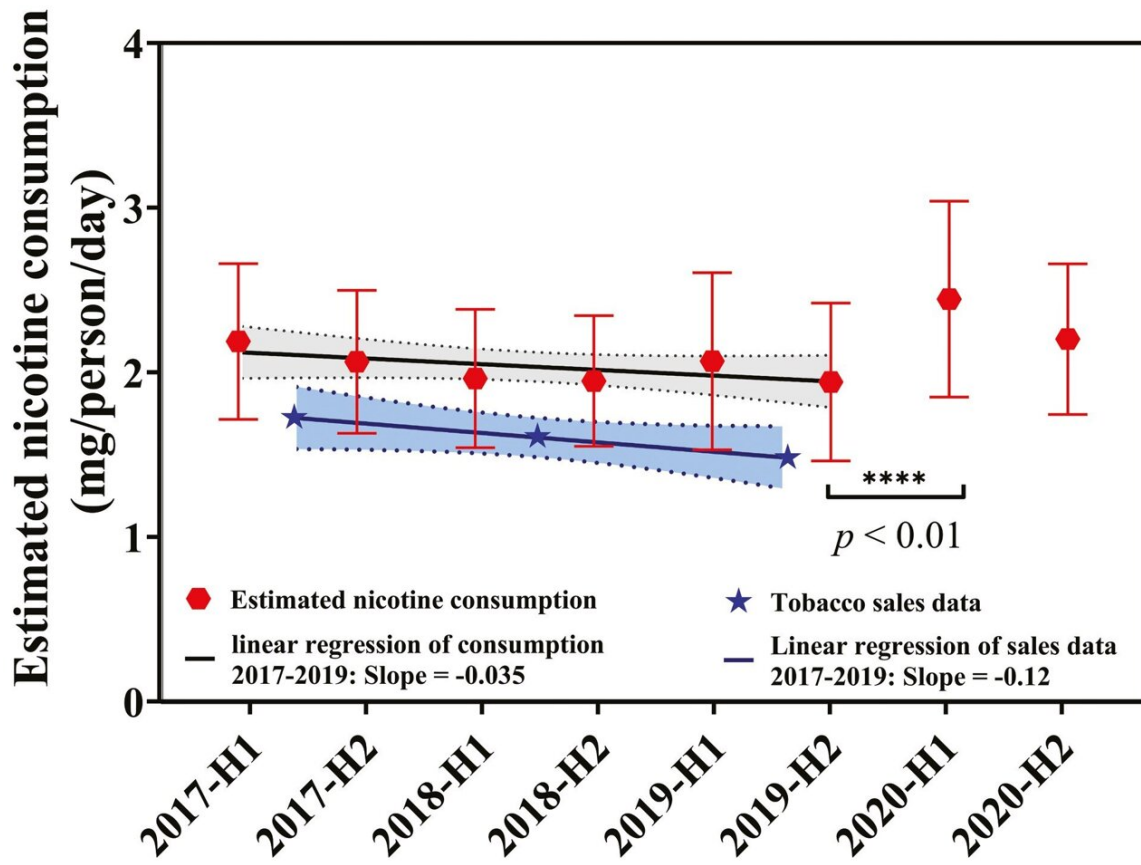


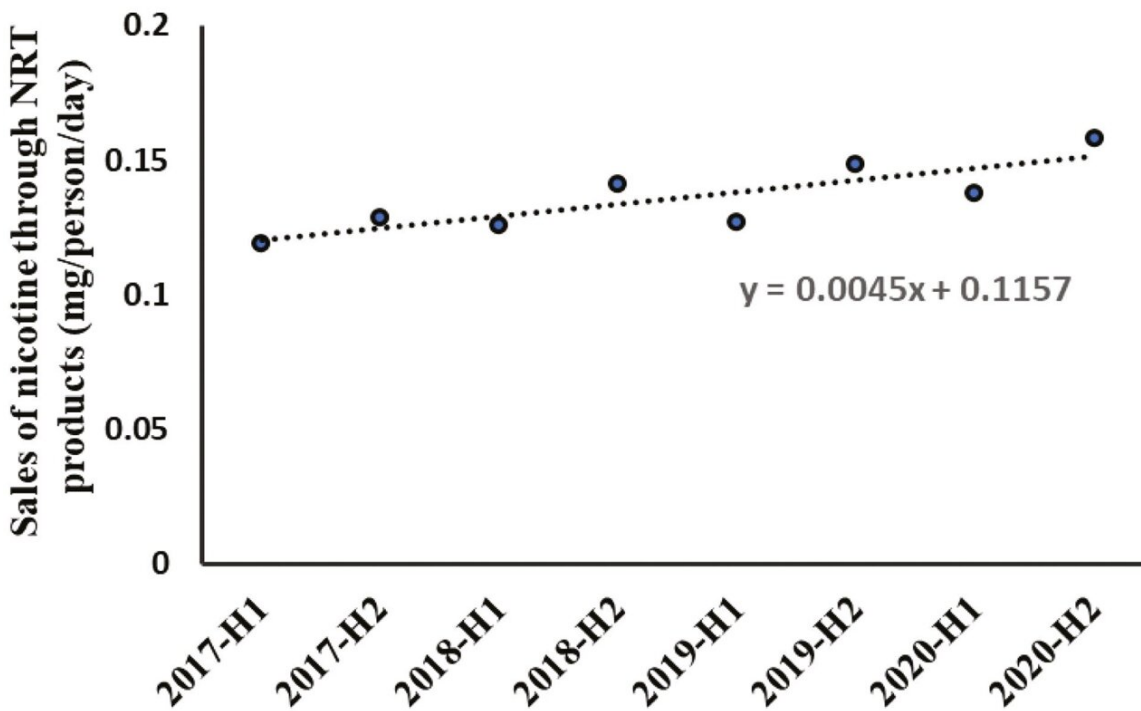
Smoking rates surged during COVID-19 in Australia, find researchers

March 10 2023

(a)



(b)



(a) Total estimated per capita nicotine use by wastewater (2017–2020; H1 = first half year) and by tobacco sales data (2017–2019), 95% confidence intervals were showed for the linear regression lines of both data set while standard error bars were showed for estimated nicotine consumptions; and (b) sales of nicotine replacement therapies 2017–2020. Credit: *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* (2023). DOI: 10.1093/ntr/ntac275

University of Queensland researchers have found nicotine consumption in Australia increased by 30% during the early stages of COVID-19.

Associate Professor Phong Thai from UQ's Queensland Alliance for Environmental Health Sciences (QAEHS) led the research, which analyzed data from the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program.

"Tobacco and nicotine consumption have been decreasing in Australia, however the COVID-19 pandemic may have temporarily disrupted this trend," Dr. Thai said.

"Our findings estimate nicotine consumption in the first half of 2020 was significantly higher than the second half of 2019.

"The increase coincides with Australia's first wave of COVID-19 cases which saw the implementation of public health measures such as lockdowns, social-distancing and working from home.

"These changes could have increased nicotine consumption due to people managing higher stress levels, as well as [greater opportunities](#) to smoke or vape whilst working from home."

The research found nicotine use decreased again as COVID-19 restrictions eased but remained higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Dr. Ben Tscharke from QAEHS said the uncertainties during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic may have had a detrimental impact on quitting activity.

"When faced with extreme stress people may resort to things like [smoking](#) to try and alleviate their anxiety," Dr. Tscharke said.

"The introduction of lockdowns, social distancing, isolation and the general uncertainty about the danger of COVID-19 placed significant stress on people. Our findings suggest the social and [economic impacts](#) of the pandemic may have decreased motivation to quit smoking or contributed to a relapse in smoking among people who recently quit.

"As smoking can cause higher morbidity and mortality risks than COVID-19 in Australia, it is important to maintain progress in reducing smoking by supporting quit efforts."

Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of illness and [premature death](#) globally and in Australia.

More information: Phong K Thai et al, Increased Nicotine Consumption in Australia During the First Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/ntr/ntac275](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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