



STOPPING TOBACCO
ORGANIZATIONS & PRODUCTS

How the tobacco industry has exploited COVID-19



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<https://exposetobacco.org/covid-19-action-center/>

<https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/covid-19/>



TobaccoTactics.org

“We investigate the strategies and tactics the tobacco industry uses to undermine public health.”



STOP. A GLOBAL TOBACCO INDUSTRY WATCHDOG

COVID-19 Monitoring Brief
Global

STOP COVID-19 Monitoring Brief: The tobacco industry, its interests and allies

Edition 10: September/October – Focus on Tobacco Industry and a COVID-19 Vaccine

October 26, 2020

This brief is issued once a month covering the previous 4 weeks' developments, followed by a report focussed on a particular aspect of industry response over the course of the pandemic

Developments in the September/October monitoring period

Science of smoking and COVID-19

- A (non-systematic) review by Kashyap et al. (University of Texas Rio Grande) of 181 studies relating to smoking and COVID-19 found “active smoking is associated with increased severity of disease and death”, “Smoking can upregulate the angiotensin-converting enzyme-2 (ACE-2) receptor utilized by SARS-CoV-2 to enter the host cell and activate a ‘cytokine storm’ which can lead to worse outcomes in COVID-19 patients”.
- A group of French and Swiss public health academics publishing

A threat to the Industry



- COVID-19 lung disease - reputational concern
- Quitting during lockdown
- Closing down factories
- Reduced cigarette consumption - LMICs

COVID-19 Impact on Consumption Patterns



In Developed Markets	In Certain Developing Markets
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stronger social support programs• Only limited impact on consumption so far• Instances of pantry-loading in certain markets around the introduction of restrictions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Generally short-lived– Minimal impact on Q1, 2020 performance– Distributor and trade inventory movements being the bigger influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High prevalence of daily wage workers, lower resources for social support, greater income fragility• Initial signs of down-trading, reduced daily consumption in some countries• Assume this will temporarily continue while pandemic-driven restrictions last• Less developed route-to-market infrastructure:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Potential difficulties for some smaller general trade outlets, which may lead to temporary localized out-of-stocks

A threat to the Industry



- Calls for higher industry taxation and paying for health care costs
- Predicted recession



Industry Response



- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Policy Interference
- Workers and manufacture
- Marketing
- Influence on science and public health alignment

Corporate Social Responsibility



- “Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to voluntary corporate action that claims to act in the public interest by prioritising social goals rather than being solely profit-driven.” TobaccoTactics.com
- Industry messaging: part of the solution, highlight donations and vaccine development, work with government officials

Korean tobacco company, KT&G, donated COVID-19 testing kits to Indonesia, Turkey and Russia



Corporate Social Responsibility



- Industry action: money, food supplies, PPE, ventilators
- Vaccine development – Medicigo (40% PMI), Kentucky BioProcessing (100% BAT)
- Impact: positive news stories, access to policymakers, challenge regulation (WHO FCTC article 5.3)
- Counter: expose intentions in media and academia, targeting countries with relaxed regulations and important markets (LMICs), countries forced to choose **tobacco control** or **essential supplies**



The official journal of ENSP, the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention  *European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention*

June/2020 vol. 6

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INDUSTRY MONITORING LETTERS < >

Social responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic: Tobacco industry's trojan horse in Europe

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[More details](#)

Tob. Prev. Cessation 2020;6(June):37

> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18332/tpc/123244>

 [Article \(PDF\)](#)

[References \(7\)](#)

Policy Interference



- During pandemic, governments decide whether to ban tobacco products or list as 'essential to life' - short-term tobacco regulation
- Where bans happen or factories close industry fights:
- Illicit trade arguments: **“We warned and cautioned government that the black market has a dynamic supply chain and it will capitalise on the lockdown.”** Johnny Moloto, External affairs South African head - British American Tobacco
- Ignore policies: Local government (Santa Cruz do Sul) decreed ban on non-essential manufacture. PMI continued production at its factory. **“Preserving the health of our public, without compromising the business,”** Alejandro Okroglic, PMI COO

Policy Interference



- Industry lobbying: Russia factories to reopen, Ministry of Industries in Bangladesh to reject tobacco ban, UAE and Lebanon against waterpipe bans, extensions on menthol regulation
- Legal action: South Africa industry group (FITA) and BAT took government to court over ban, ban lifted after multiple court actions
- Usual industry arguments: Illicit trade, ‘policy dystopia’, expose and inform governments



**Global
Tobacco
Industry
Interference
Index** 2019

Tobacco workers



- Worker exploitation increased during COVID-19. Unsafe conditions in factories and on farms.
- Indonesia Sampoerna (PMI) factory - 2 workers died, 63 tested positive
- Malawi farmers losing out at auctions

BLOGS, COVID-19

June 12, 2020

Zambian Farm Workers Risk Their Health for Japan Tobacco International



Concerning photos from a tobacco farm in Zambia show only some workers wearing masks, while others wear them incorrectly—or not at all. The farm, which is in Chief Chanje’s chiefdom, supplies tobacco to Japan Tobacco International (JTI), according to Brenda Chitindi, Executive Director of the Tobacco-Free Association of Zambia.

While the Zambian government ordered [restrictions on mass gatherings](#), [closed schools](#), [prohibited non-essential travel](#) and implemented lockdowns in particular districts, Chitindi says tobacco farms have remained fully operational throughout the pandemic.

Marketing



- Exploiting COVID-19 to market products - especially Next Generation products
- <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-big-tobacco-sees-an-opportunity-in-the-pandemic-138188>
BAT's board told investors that its redefined mission was now "stimulating the senses of a new adult generation".
- Appropriating #stayathome – PMI and BAT



Figure 2 British American Tobacco's (BAT) heated tobacco product Glo-themed facemasks carry the message #todayiwill followed by 'stay home'. The Instagram hashtag #todayiwill has over 15 000 posts, many

Influencing science



- The consensus is smoking increases severity and mortality of COVID-19 ([WHO Scientific Brief](#)) ([Living review](#))
- Uncertainty remains about risk of infection in smokers ([Union scientific briefs](#)) ([Living review](#)):
- [Biologically plausible mechanisms](#) for both protective and harmful effect but extreme caution needed - idea that smoking might protect goes against established knowledge on smoking and its impacts on immunity & infection



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COVID-19, Smoking, And Vaping: More Research Needed

Influencing science



- Those with vested interests, including links to TI, were quick to publish and/or promote studies & theories suggesting smoking and/or nicotine is protective
- Widespread use of preprint platforms - publication without peer review - contributed
- Non peer-reviewed studies and hypotheses picked up by the media as engrossing stories.
- Caused unnecessary confusion & downplayed the negative impacts of smoking
- TI has a long history of influencing science. Research is needed to better understand whether/how industry involved in COVID-19 research

A screenshot of the MailOnline news website. The page features a navigation bar with categories like Home, News, U.S., Sport, TV&Showbiz, Australia, Femail, Health, Science, and Money. Below the navigation bar, there are several news headlines with accompanying images. The headlines include: 'Pictured: Terror victim beheaded by', 'Ministers drag another 16', 'Covid toes' that turn purple from the', and 'What's the TRUTH behind England's'. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a large text block that reads: 'Does smoking PROTECT against coronavirus? That was the amazing claim from David Hockney but multiple scientific studies now suggest he might be on to something'.

Future tactics



- Continuing CSR donations - vaccine development efforts used as PR
- Collaborate with online delivery services, adapt to new lifestyles
- Increase sponsored science publishing in unregulated preprint journals
- Use pandemic to promote “modified risk” next generation products (IQOS, e-cigarettes)



Summary



- COVID-19 is crucial time for tobacco control efforts. Industry has had success during pandemic.
- Industry using typical tactics to take advantage of pandemic. Targeting most vulnerable countries.
- 7-8 million deaths a year, billions in profits.
- Not a time to collaborate with tobacco industry, call for accountability and taxation and encourage cessation.





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Tobaccotactics.org
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The screenshot shows the Tobacco Tactics website page for COVID-19. The header includes the Tobacco Tactics logo, the University of Bath logo, a search bar, and a link to sign up for updates. The main heading is 'COVID-19', with a note that the page was last edited on 06 May 2020 at 1:05 pm. Below the heading are social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and Email. The page is divided into two columns: 'Contents' and 'Background'. The 'Contents' column lists four items: 1. Background, 2. Attempts to confuse the science linking smoking to COVID-19, 3. Tobacco industry participation in vaccine development, and 4. Targeted donations and corporate social responsibility. The 'Background' column contains a paragraph of text: 'The COVID-19 pandemic is of particular relevance to the tobacco industry due to the nature of the disease. It is a viral infection of the lungs that can be severe and fatal. A host of tobacco-related conditions have been identified as associated risk factors for a severe form of the disease including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.¹ Tobacco products and their associated health risks have therefore received increasing negative attention.²'

STOP COVID-19 Monitoring Briefs:
<https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/covid-19/#COVID19-briefings>