

## WHO to launch initiative to help 1.3 bln people quit smoking

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Geneva, July 10 (Net) - The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that it will launch an initiative to help 1.3 billion tobacco-users worldwide kick the habit during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Access Initiative for Quitting Tobacco will help people freely access the resources they need to quit tobacco, like nicotine replacement therapy and access to a digital health worker "Florence" for advice, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a briefing on Friday.

The world's first digital health is the computer-generated face of the Access Initiative for Quitting Tobacco, announced on Friday by WHO and partners.

Using Artificial Intelligence, she will help smokers develop personalized plans to quit tobacco, while also dispelling myths around COVID-19 and smoking.

According to the UN health body, smoking kills 8 million people a year, and evidence reveals that smokers are more vulnerable than non-smokers to developing a severe case of Covid-19. "But if users need more motivation to kick the habit, the pandemic provides the right incentive," said Tedros.

The initiative is led by WHO, together with the UN Interagency Task Force on Non-communicable Diseases (NCD).

The initiative brings together tech industry, pharmaceutical, and NGO partners like PATH and the Coalition for Access to NCD Medicines and Products.

As the first manufacturing partner of the initiative, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health said that it has donated nearly 40,000 nicotine patches.

Tedros said the WHO is in the final stages of adding more partners and encourages pharmaceutical and tech companies to join the initiative.

WHO will first launch the initiative in Jordan and then roll it out globally over the coming months, said Tedros.