Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions
For People with Weakened Immune Systems

This guidance document will continue to be updated as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Visit www.coronavirusnetwork.org for the latest information, updates and resources.

What is the coronavirus?
Coronavirus is a type of virus that causes illness ranging from a common cold to more severe lung problems. There are many types of coronaviruses. There is a new (novel) type of coronavirus that is spreading around the world. It has been given the name COVID-19. Other names you may hear for the new coronavirus are SARS-CoV-2 or 2019-nCoV.

Who is at risk for severe coronavirus?
Anyone with a weakened immune system is more at risk for getting severe coronavirus. This includes older people, particularly those over 70, people with lung problems, people with chronic health problems, and people taking medication or treatment that weakens their body’s ability to fight infections. These people are more likely to get very sick if they get coronavirus and more likely to die.

How do I know if I have a weakened immune system?
Your immune system is your body’s way of fighting off infections. It helps keep you from getting sick and helps you get well when you do get sick. As people age, the immune system gets weaker so anyone 70 or older should consider themselves at higher risk. Others who are high risk include:

- People who have chronic health problems like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease
- People with lung problems like asthma or COPD
- People with HIV
- People who are on medication to decrease their immune system such as people with lupus or rheumatoid arthritis
- People who regularly take steroids like prednisone
- People who are on medication after a transplant
- People who are in treatment for cancer such as people receiving chemotherapy

If you are not sure if you are high risk or not, call your health care provider.

Does having a weak immune system mean I will get coronavirus?
No, if your immune system is weak your body will have a harder time fighting off the coronavirus than someone with a stronger immune system. However, this does not mean you will get coronavirus or that you will die if you get it. You must be exposed to coronavirus to get it.

What can I do to prevent the coronavirus?
Coronavirus is passed from one person to another by “droplets” that come from someone’s cough or sneeze. You get the coronavirus when you come into contact with the droplets directly,
or the droplets get on your hands and then you touch your face, including your eyes. The most practical way to prevent getting coronavirus is washing your hands with soap regularly and avoiding touching your face, especially when out in public. When you wash your hands it should be for at least twenty seconds, and get both sides as well as under your nails. If you are living in an area with reported cases of coronavirus, avoid public place where you are close to people or touching the same surfaces.

**How should I prepare right now?**
You should prepare to avoid public areas and stay at your home when there is an outbreak (lots of people getting sick) in your community. Here are some things to think about to help you prepare:

- Buy and store food. Buy items that can last on your shelf for some time and give you the nutrition you need if you cannot go to the store for a few weeks.
- Fill your medications or ask your provider for an extra refill so you have plenty of medicine at home.
- If you can, set up a medication delivery service so medication can be mailed to you. This allows you to get your regular medication without going to the pharmacy where there might be people with coronavirus.
- Buy extra supplies of things you cannot go without if you are stuck in your house for 2-4 weeks.
- Talk to your employer about options for working from home.
- Think about things you need for your health such as water for a CPAP machine, oxygen, or syringes for insulin. Make sure you have extra at home.
- Talk to your family members and caregivers so that they can also avoid getting the coronavirus. If you have a family member who is likely to be exposed to the virus, such as a health care worker, you may need to avoid close contact for a while.

**How should I manage my health care when people at the clinic might have coronavirus?**
Check any email or voicemail messages from your clinic or health care provider. You should also regularly check their website for any updates about the coronavirus or new recommendations. Talk to your health care provider about getting your regular check-ups and medication. You may be able to set up emailing between you and your provider. You may also be able to have phone call visits or other types of virtual visits. These let you talk to your provider without coming to the clinic where people are sick.

**What do I do if I think I have the coronavirus?**
If you have a cough and/or fever, call your health care provider immediately. Your health care provider can tell you when and where to seek care. Do not wait until you feel really bad or are getting worse. It is best to make a plan with your health care provider early. Most people can get better at home. Get to a hospital if you have trouble breathing, shortness of breath, pain in your chest, feel like you are very confused or notice your lips or face turning blue.

Information for this FAQ came from: