Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions
For People with Compromised 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 and COVID-19?

There are many different kinds of coronaviruses. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that live in humans and animals. A number of human coronaviruses are commonly known to cause illness by infecting the lungs. The previously undiscovered, or novel (new) coronavirus that is responsible for the 2019-2020 outbreak causes the illness known as COVID-19. ‘CO’ stands for ‘corona,’ ‘VI’ stands for ‘virus,’ and ‘D’ stands for ‘disease.’ ‘19’ refers to the year ‘2019,’ which is the year the illness was discovered. COVID-19 leads to illness that is similar to the cold or flu in mild cases. The majority of cases are mild cases and go away within two weeks. In severe cases, COVID-19 leads to pneumonia-like symptoms and can cause death. Death is primarily caused by congestion in the lungs and organ failure due to lack of oxygen taken in by the lungs. Deaths from vascular problems, like stroke, have also been linked to COVID-19.

Who is most likely to get severely sick from COVID-19?

People over the age of 65 and people with other chronic health problems are most likely to get the sickest from COVID-19 and are the most at risk of dying. Other people at increased risk for getting severely sick from COVID-19 are people with untreated or undertreated HIV and other people whose immune systems might be weakened or compromised, such as cancer patients. The chronic health conditions that are believed to put people at increased risk of severe illness include:

- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Chronic lung disease, such as COPD and asthma
- Chronic kidney disease
- Serious heart conditions

How do I know if I have a compromised 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 65 or older should consider themselves at higher risk. There are also many chronic health conditions, medications, and medical procedures that weaken the immune system.
system’s ability to fight off infection. People who have high risk of serious illness from COVID-19 due to a weakened immune system include:

- People who have chronic health problems, like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, and severe obesity.
- People with lung problems, like asthma or COPD
- People with untreated or undertreated HIV
- People with genetic immune deficiencies
- People with cancer
- People who received a solid organ transplant or bone marrow transplant
- People who received stem cell treatment or chemotherapy for cancer
- People with lupus or rheumatoid arthritis
- People who regularly take oral or intravenous corticosteroids and other medicines called immunosuppressants like prednisone, mycophenolate, sirolimus, cyclosporine, tacrolimus, etanercept, and rituximab

If you are not sure if you are high risk or not, call your healthcare provider or doctor.

**Does having a weak immune system mean it is easier for me to get coronavirus?**

No, having a weak immune system does mean it is easier for you to get coronavirus then someone with a normal immune system. However, it does mean that your body will have a harder time fighting off the coronavirus than someone with a stronger immune system.

**What can I do to prevent getting 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 in the air, or the droplets get on your hands when you touch a contaminated surface and then you touch your face, especially your eyes, mouth, and nose. The most practical ways to prevent getting coronavirus are wearing a mask in public, maintaining 6 feet of distance from other people in public, washing your hands with soap regularly, and avoiding touching your face, especially when out in public with unwashed hands. When you wash your hands it should be for at least twenty seconds, and get both sides as well as under your nails. Avoid all unnecessary travel and contact with others. If you do have to go out for any reason and interact with others, it is best to wear a face mask that covers your nose and mouth. Also, if possible, have food and other needed supplies delivered to you and ask people to cover their nose and mouth with a face mask when they are around you.

**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 that can give you the nutrition you need so you do not have to go out to shop for groceries often. If you can, have your groceries delivered by friends, family or through a service.
- Continue to take prescribed medication and do not stop without speaking with your doctor.
- Discuss any worries or concerns you may have about your ongoing treatment with your doctor or provider.
- Fill your medications or ask your provider or doctor for an emergency refill so you have plenty of medicine at home. You should have at least 30 days of prescription medicine, if possible.
- 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.
- 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 or the doctor’s office 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 (telehealth) visits. These types of visits 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 symptoms of coronavirus, 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 are turning blue.

Information for this FAQ came from:
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Please note that the guidance in this document does not substitute for the recommendations of your healthcare provider.