

# COVID-19 and Chronic Kidney Disease: What you need to know

You may be worried about COVID-19 and have questions about how the pandemic will affect you and your kidney care.

- COVID-19 is a virus that can be more dangerous than the common cold or flu.
- As a person with chronic kidney disease, you may be at a higher risk of getting seriously ill from a COVID-19 infection. This is because people with chronic kidney disease have compromised immune systems, making it harder to fight infections.
- COVID-19 can cause very mild symptoms (such as a cough) to severe pneumonia (lung infections). Severe symptoms can be life-threatening and need to be treated at the hospital.
- It is important for people with chronic kidney disease, as well as their family, friends and caregivers, to know how to keep themselves safe during this pandemic.

## How to protect yourself from COVID-19:

People with COVID-19 may not feel or seem sick but they can still pass the virus to others. To lower your chance of being exposed to the virus:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that has at least 70% alcohol.
- Do not touch your face, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- **Stay at home** as much as possible,. Only go out for medical appointments or treatments that must take place in person. Do not continue to work outside your home or visit public spaces.

- If you must leave your home for dialysis or other necessary health appointments, stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from people you do not live with. This is called social or physical distancing.
- Have groceries and other items delivered or ask someone else to pick them up for you. Pay for deliveries online or over the phone. Wash your hands after accepting a delivery.
- Wash or wipe down all items that come into your home, including groceries.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Clean common surfaces as much as possible. This includes door handles, hand rails, phones, computers and tablets, remote controls and light switches.

## **How your chronic kidney disease treatment may be changed:**

Your kidney care team is working together with others to do what is best for you and for the healthcare system. To best protect patients and healthcare workers, you may see the following changes in your treatments.

For chronic dialysis patients:

- Dialysis is a life-sustaining treatment and must be continued during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- If you do dialysis at a hospital, you will be screened at the entrance of the hospital. Screening might include answering some questions about how you are feeling. You may also be screened again when entering the dialysis unit. Answer questions honestly. It is in your best interest. **No one will be refused care.**
- Your kidney care team may make some change to your treatment plan, including reducing the number of times you come to the hospital (or satellite) to do dialysis, or changing the time you usually start your dialysis treatment.
- You may be given a mask to wear during your treatment. Many patients are wearing their own cloth face masks. Wearing a mask can protect healthcare providers and other patients in case you are sick but have not yet shown symptoms.

- Avoid touching common surfaces (such as door handles and elevator buttons) with your bare hands.
- If you do home dialysis (peritoneal or home hemodialysis), your clinic visits may be held by videoconference or telephone.
- If you are experiencing any symptoms, tell your kidney care team.

For patients followed in Multi-Care Kidney Clinics:

- Your clinic visits may be held by videoconference or telephone so you do not have to come into the hospital. Some of your appointments may be postponed to a later date.
- Non-essential in-person contact, such as patient group education sessions, are being cancelled or changed to telephone or by videoconference visits where appropriate.
- If you are experiencing any symptoms, please tell your kidney care team.

For patients actively followed in a Glomerulonephritis (GN) Clinic:

- You have a higher risk of infection from viruses because you take immunosuppressive medications.
- Do **not** stop taking your immunosuppressant medications without first contacting your healthcare team. Stopping medications can cause kidney disease to relapse, which can also place you at risk for infection or other serious health problems.
- If you develop symptoms (fever OR cough OR diarrhea), your GN team will guide any necessary changes to your medication regimen.

For patients who have received a kidney transplant:

- You have a higher risk of infection from viruses because you take immunosuppressive medications.
- Do **not** stop taking your immunosuppressant medications or lower your dose, unless your healthcare team tells you to.
- If a clinic visit is not needed, your Transplant Team will notify you. You may only need blood work with a follow up phone call.
- If you have a fever or showing any COVID symptoms, please contact your Transplant Team.

It is normal to feel nervous or worried if your kidney treatment plan has changed. Talk to your kidney care team about your concerns.

### **Traveling to and from the hospital:**

- Public transportation, such as buses and subways, can increase your potential exposure to COVID-19.
- Where possible, ask for a family member to be available to provide you with transportation if you should need it. Or, you may choose to use a taxi or ride share service to limit your exposure to large numbers of people.
- If you are having problems arranging transportation to dialysis, speak with your kidney care team.

### **If you need more of your medication(s):**

- Call your pharmacy to ask for a refill.
- During the pandemic, all medication refills will be for a one-month supply of medication.
- Have your pharmacy deliver the medication or ask someone to pick it up for you.

## **What to do if you do not feel well:**

**Contact your kidney care team** if you have symptoms of COVID-19, such as:

- fever
- cough
- mild difficulty breathing
- achy muscles
- fatigue
- headache
- sore throat
- runny nose

Many people with chronic kidney disease, especially those on hemodialysis, have shortness of breath or cough after 2 - 3 days without a dialysis treatment. If you have these symptoms more than usual let your care team know.

If you are unable to speak with your kidney care team, call your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse) or Telehealth Ontario at **1-866-797-0000**.

**Call 911 if you are having severe symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, such as feeling like you cannot breathe.**

## **How to take care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic:**

- Your healthcare team is there for you. If you are very worried about COVID-19, you should ask for help.
- If you find it upsetting to hear about the pandemic, limit your time watching, reading, or listening to news stories.
- Take care of your body. Eat healthy, be active, and get plenty of sleep.

- Make time to relax and do things you enjoy, such as reading, listening to music, cooking, or watching a movie.
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones through telephone or video chats. Social distancing refers to the physical distance between people. It does not mean social isolation.
- Alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs can worsen your health and well-being. Talk to your healthcare team if this affects you.

### **For more information:**

For more information on **COVID-19** visit:

- Ontario Health: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus>
- Health Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

For more information or to speak with someone about your **emotional well-being or mental health** contact:

Bounceback Ontario (for help with managing low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or worry):

- Visit [bouncebackontario.ca](http://bouncebackontario.ca) or call 1-866-345-0224

ConnexOntario (Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Helpline):

- Visit [connexontario.ca](http://connexontario.ca) or call 1-866-531-2600

Kidney Foundation of Canada:

- Visit [Kidney.ca](http://Kidney.ca) or call 1-800-387-4474

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