

## COVID-19 and chronic kidney disease: What you need to know

You may be worried about COVID-19 and have questions about how it will affect you and your kidney care. Here's what you need to know:

- People with chronic kidney disease have compromised immune systems, making it harder to fight infections, which means you may be at a higher risk of getting seriously ill from a COVID-19 infection.
- You may be tested for COVID-19 during your visit to a clinic or hospital as a precaution or if you have symptoms.
- 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 time.

### How to protect yourself from COVID-19:

To protect yourself and reduce the risk 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 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching 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.
- Try to have groceries and other items delivered to your home 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.

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- While there are no special precautions needed when storing food, wash your hands after putting away food that has been purchased and before preparing food and wash fruits and vegetables under running, potable water.
  - Avoid contact from people who are sick.
  - Clean high touch surface areas as much as possible such as door handles, hand rails, phones, computers and tablets, remote controls and light switches.

## **Information about your chronic kidney disease treatment during this time:**

For chronic dialysis patients:

- Dialysis is a life-sustaining treatment and must be continued during this time.
- If you do dialysis at a hospital, you will be screened at the entrance and when you enter the dialysis unit. Screening might include answering some questions about how you are feeling. **You will receive treatment and care regardless of your screening results.**
- 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 location) to do dialysis, or changing the time you usually start your 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 health care providers and other patients in case you are sick but have not yet shown symptoms.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer often and especially if you have touched anything in the hospital and before entering and after leaving the hospital.
- 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.

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- Non-essential, in-person services and programs, 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 health care 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 health care 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-19 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.

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## **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. Consider taking 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 this time, all medication refills will be for a one-month supply of medication.
- Check to see if your pharmacy can deliver your medication to your home 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
- Difficulty breathing
- Achy muscles
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

For the most up-to-date list of COVID-19 symptoms, visit: [ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread](https://ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread).

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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**.

**Only call 911 if it is an emergency, such as feeling like you cannot breathe.**

### **How to take care of yourself during this time:**

- Your health care 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 COVID-19, try limiting 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 Ministry of Health: [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus)
- Health Canada: [canada.ca/coronavirus](https://canada.ca/coronavirus)

For more information on **kidney disease** visit:

- Kidney Foundation of Canada: [Kidney.ca](https://kidney.ca) or call 1-800-387-4474

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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](https://bouncebackontario.ca) or call 1-866-345-0224

ConnexOntario (Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Helpline):

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

*The information set out in this information sheet is intended to be used by health professionals and patients for informational purposes only. Patients should always consult their healthcare providers if they have any questions regarding the information set out in this sheet. The information is not intended to act as or replace medical advice and should not be relied upon in any such regard.*

Created April 2020 by the Ontario Renal Network at Ontario Health, with input from patient and family advisors.