

# Learning About Being High-Risk for Serious Illness From COVID-19

## Who is at high risk?

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COVID-19 causes a mild illness in many people who have it. But certain things may increase your risk for more serious illness. These include:

- Age.
  - Babies born premature or who are **less than 1 year old** may be at high risk.
  - The risk also increases with age. Older adults are at highest risk.
- Asthma, cystic fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and other chronic lung diseases.
- Vaping or smoking or having a history of smoking.
- Serious heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or high blood pressure.
- Tuberculosis (TB).
- HIV.
- A weakened immune system or taking medicines, such as steroids, that suppress the immune system. This also includes medicines taken because of an organ transplant.
- Cancer or getting treatment for cancer.
- Neurologic conditions or diseases that involve the nerves and brain, such as stroke, dementia, or cerebral palsy.
- Being overweight (obesity).
- Diabetes.
- Chronic kidney disease.
- Liver disease.
- Substance use disorders.
- Sickle cell disease.
- Pregnancy or a recent pregnancy.
- Genetic, metabolic, or neurologic problems in children. This includes children who may have many health problems that affect many body systems. These problems may limit how well the child can do routine activities of daily life.
- Down syndrome.
- Mood disorders, such as depression or schizophrenia.

Some people have a higher risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19 because of where they live or work. The risk can also be higher if people don't have access to health care. This includes people from certain racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as people with disabilities.

This is not a complete list. If you have a chronic health problem, ask your doctor if you should take extra precautions. The more of these things you have, the higher your risk for serious illness. Talk with your doctor about ways to manage your risk.

## Should you get the COVID-19 vaccine if you have an underlying health problem?

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The simple answer is yes. The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective for almost everyone. The only people advised not to get it are those who have had a severe allergic reaction to the vaccine's ingredients.

Experts recommend getting the vaccine. This is especially true if you have an underlying health problem like diabetes, chronic lung disease, or obesity. Getting infected with COVID-19 can be much worse if you have conditions like these.

If you have a weakened immune system, you may be at higher risk for getting seriously ill with COVID-19. The vaccine may not work as well for you, but it should still be safe.

Talk with your doctor if you have any questions about the vaccine.

## How can you protect yourself?

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Follow these guidelines until your doctor tells you it's safe to stop.

- Stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccines.
- Avoid sick people.
- Talk to your doctor to see if you need medicine to lower your risk of getting COVID-19 or getting very sick from COVID-19.
- Wear a mask with the best fit, protection, and comfort for you if you go into public areas, especially indoor spaces.
- Avoid crowds. If you have to be in a crowded area, wear a mask. This is important even if you're outside.
- Choose outdoor visits and activities when possible.
- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes.
- Improve airflow. If you have to spend time indoors with others, open windows and doors. Or you can use a fan to blow air away from people and out a window.
- Ask the people you live with or who are in close contact with you to stay up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines.
- Ask the people you live with to wear a mask in public areas. This is important even if they're up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines.
- Ask people who don't live with you to get a COVID-19 test before visiting with them.
- Have COVID-19 tests available at home, or know where to get tested. If you get symptoms, get a test right away.
- If you test positive for COVID-19 or you're sick, call your doctor right away.

## Should you get the COVID-19 vaccine if you are planning a pregnancy, are pregnant, were recently pregnant, or are breastfeeding?

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Experts recommend getting the COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant, were recently pregnant, or are breastfeeding. The vaccine is also recommended if you are planning a pregnancy. Talk to your doctor about getting the vaccine. Other vaccines, like the flu vaccine, are safely given in pregnancy and after pregnancy. There is **no** evidence that vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine, cause fertility problems. The risk of problems from the COVID-19 vaccine should be far smaller than the risks to you and your baby from having

the infection. Having COVID-19 while pregnant increases your risk of preterm labor and stillbirth. So getting the COVID-19 vaccine is important for you and your baby.

## Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **A131** in the search box to learn more about **"Learning About Being High-Risk for Serious Illness From COVID-19"**.

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