Chronic Diseases and COVID-19
STAYING HEALTHY

If you have a chronic disease, you are more likely to experience serious complications if you get COVID-19.

COVID-19 has further revealed the historical and current inequities in our society. Structural racism plays a role in people of color being at a higher risk for chronic diseases, and that increases their risk for serious complications from COVID-19.

In addition to taking steps to protect yourself from COVID-19, one of the most important things you can do if you have a chronic disease – especially if you are 65 or older or have a disability – is to take good care of your health. You can also use this information to help take care of your family, friends, and community.

If you have…

Diabetes

Monitor blood sugar regularly and keep taking all medications following your provider's instructions. Keeping blood sugar in control can lower risk of complications from COVID-19. If you are having trouble paying for your diabetes medications, ADA can help.

Asthma

COVID-19 harms the lungs, so it's important to manage triggers, use your controller and rescue medications, and follow your asthma action plan (if you have one). Since many household cleaning products can make your asthma worse, try to clean and disinfect your home following CDC guidelines.

Heart Disease

Keep taking your heart medications following your provider's instructions. Lowering your stress level can also help keep your heart healthy. Try deep breathing, get 6-8 hours of sleep, try to eat a healthy diet, and exercise when you can.

Cancer

Cancer and cancer treatments can weaken the immune system which makes it harder to fight COVID-19. It is especially important for you to avoid unnecessary contact with others, so talk to your provider about having oral medications shipped to you, to avoid a trip to your provider's office or the pharmacy.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure increases risk for complications from COVID-19. Monitor your blood pressure at home and keep taking all medications following your provider's instructions.

Nicotine Addiction

People who smoke or vape risk the possibility of getting sick with COVID-19. Smoking and vaping cause inflammation and stress your immune system; also cigarettes and vapes move from your hand to your mouth. Wash your hands as much as possible, and reduce trips to the store.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

If you have any chronic disease, take these healthy steps:

Talk to your provider about the safest way to schedule your healthcare appointment.

Ask for an **extra supply of medication** in case you can't get to the pharmacy. Keep taking your medication following your provider's instructions.

Ask if you need any **vaccinations**, such as the flu and pneumonia.

Focus on healthy eating and regular exercise to control stress and stay healthy.

Eat healthy foods when you can, like fruits, vegetables and lean proteins.

Find ways to exercise safely at home. If you go outside, follow social distancing guidelines and wear a mask or cloth face cover.

Control stress. Take breaks from the news, try deep breathing exercises, or do an activity that you enjoy.

Quit smoking and/or vaping, even if you have tried quitting before.

Smoking and vaping can harm the lungs and increase the risk of complications from COVID-19. Free coaching support and medications are available:

Call: 1-800-QUIT-NOW

Visit: KeepTryingMA.org

Protect Yourself from COVID-19:

- When you can, stay at home. Only leave when you need to, like to work an essential job, go to the grocery store or pharmacy, or in a medical emergency.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from other people when you are outside of your home.
- Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds each time with soap and water.
- When you are in a place where it is hard to keep 6 feet away from other people, wear a mask or cloth face cover.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that you touch a lot, like cell phones, door knobs, faucets and counters.

Check to see if you have symptoms of COVID-19

 Don't hesitate to call 911 in an emergency – especially if you think you could be having a heart attack, are experiencing **any** sign of stroke, if you've been a victim of sexual assault or any kind of violence, or have another type of injury.

Even during COVID-19, 911 is still the fastest way to get care and possibly, save a life. EMS and hospitals in Massachusetts are taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

✔ **Call 911 if you experience any sign of stroke:** Face drooping, arm weakness, or speech difficulty.

✔ **Call 911 if you think you may be having a heart attack:** Chest pain, chest heaviness, significant shortness of breath, cold sweats, sometimes paired with nausea or light-headedness.

✔ **Call 911 or SafeLink (877-785-2020) if you've been a victim of sexual assault** or any kind of violence.