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What People with Pre-existing Pulmonary Conditions Need to Know to Protect Themselves From COVID-19

Thomas Ardiles, MD, University of Arizona College of Medicine – Phoenix clinical assistant professor of Internal Medicine and a pulmonologist, answers questions about people with compromised lungs.

If I have a pre-existing pulmonary condition, do I have to take extra precautions against contracting COVID-19?

While in a pandemic, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is very high. We do not understand much about this virus because it is relatively new, but the experience from other countries has shown that it is very contagious. It can be spread even if an infected person is not symptomatic. Therefore, we recommend that if you have an underlying lung disease, take extra care with hand washing, constant surface disinfecting and avoid touching your face and eyes. And, of course, stay home as much as possible.

Minimize contact with others, continue taking your medications to prevent exacerbations of chronic conditions and be very strict with hand washing and disinfecting.

What should I do if I can't work from home?

Every work environment is different. We hope every business understands the gravity of the situation and adopts strategies to protect their employees. The best suggestion is to be vigilant and adapt to the circumstance and minimize exposure risks.

Should I worry if I am not in a vulnerable population?

Absolutely. In a pandemic we all play a role. Even though you may not be on the front lines, you can do your part by limiting your exposure and implementing hygiene measures so you don't pass it on to others.

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

We recommend you follow the [community guidelines](#) regarding when to seek medical care. Minor cases can be treated at home. If you experience concerning symptoms — such as shortness of breath or high fever — you need to seek medical attention.

How can I protect myself?

This virus is very contagious, so avoid contact with others as much as possible. Washing hands frequently and avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth are essential.

How can I help my grandparents or elderly neighbors?

Keep them home. If you can, shop for them and make sure they understand the same general protections they need to implement: hand washing, not touching their eyes, nose and mouth, constant surface disinfecting, as well as seeking medical care if they get sick.