

Respiratory Viruses and People with Disabilities

What to know

In addition to CDC's Respiratory Virus Guidance, there are several specific considerations for people who are at higher risk for severe illness, including people with disabilities.

Overview

Some disabilities can raise a person's risk of getting very sick from respiratory viruses. For example, some people with disabilities are more likely to have underlying medical conditions, live in congregate settings, or experience factors and conditions stemming from [social determinants of health](#).

Why prevention is important

Studies have shown that:

- People with certain disabilities have a higher risk of getting respiratory virus-related complications, for example:
 - During the first two COVID-19 pandemic waves, people with intellectual disabilities were equally as likely as other people to become infected but had 3.5 times the risk of death. [Learn more](#).
 - Children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental disorders are estimated to be at 5 to 7 times greater risk of hospitalization from respiratory infections than other children. [Learn more](#).

Reducing risk

If you have, or someone you spend time with has, a disability using the prevention strategies described in CDC's [Respiratory Virus Guidance](#) is especially important. In addition, there are several specific considerations for people with disabilities.

- **Immunizations**
 - The [Disability Information and Access Line \(DIAL\)](#) can help people with disabilities find local vaccination clinics, connect with accessible transportation, and provide other assistance in accessing COVID-19 vaccinations (e.g., set up vaccination appointment).
- **Masks**
 - Note that better fitting [masks](#) (for example, N95 or KN95 respirators) are more effective at protecting you from inhaling germs than other types of masks are (for example, cloth masks or surgical/disposable masks).
 - Some people with disabilities may find it difficult to wear a mask. Challenges may be caused by being sensitive to materials on the face, difficulty understanding the value of mask wearing for protection, or having difficulty keeping the mask in place. When considering whether to use a mask, people with disabilities or their caregivers can consider the person's ability to wear a mask correctly (proper mask size and fit), to avoid frequent touching of the mask and face, and to remove the mask without assistance.

CDC offers separate, specific guidance for healthcare settings ([COVID-19](#), [flu](#), and [general infection prevention and control](#)). Federal civil rights laws may require reasonable modifications or reasonable accommodations in various circumstances. Nothing in this guidance is intended to detract from or supersede those laws.

- For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or people who spend time with someone who is, clear masks or masks with clear panels are an option.
- **[Steps for cleaner air](#)**
 - Note that taking additional [steps for cleaner air](#) can be particularly helpful if you are not able to wear a mask or distance from others; for example, if you need personal assistance or direct support.
- **Treatment**
 - [COVID-19 antivirals](#) are recommended for certain people at high risk for complications from COVID-19, including people with many types of disabilities.
 - [Flu antivirals](#) are recommended for certain people at high risk for complications from flu, including people who live in congregate settings and people with many types of underlying medical conditions.
 - To learn more about if treatment is right for you, speak with a healthcare provider.
- **Tests**
 - The Administration for Community Living and the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response are partnering to distribute tests to the aging and disability networks. You may be able to get COVID-19 tests for free through your local [Center on Independent Living](#).
 - The [Disability Information and Access Line \(DIAL\) can help people with disabilities connect with local COVID-19 testing options and help with ordering free at-home test kits](#).
- **Working with support providers**
 - People with disabilities who have direct support providers can also help protect themselves from respiratory viruses in the following ways:
 - Ask direct support providers if they are experiencing any symptoms of or have other reason to believe they might have a respiratory virus.
 - Tell direct service providers to:
 - Wash their hands when they enter your home and before and after touching you (for example, dressing, bathing/showering, transferring, toileting, feeding), handling tissues, or when changing linens or doing laundry.
 - Open windows, use air filters and use other [steps for cleaner air](#) to reduce the amount of virus within indoor areas.
 - Wear a well-fitting [mask](#) over the nose and mouth.

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