

# COVID-19 AND CONGENITAL HEART DEFECTS

## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new illness caused by a coronavirus. We are just starting to learn how COVID-19 will impact people. **Your local health experts will have the most up-to-date information on how COVID-19 may affect you.**

## What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Common signs are a fever, dry cough, tiredness and body pain. Some people also have a wet cough, chest pain or difficulty breathing. A small number of people have diarrhea, vomiting, or dizziness. However, many adults and children with COVID-19 do not have any symptoms. **You can pass COVID-19 to others even if you have no symptoms.**

## How dangerous is COVID-19?

Most people get mild symptoms. Many get better in a few days. Very few children with COVID-19 have died. But this does not mean children are completely safe. COVID-19 is also a mild illness for most adults. But about one in five adults who get it need to go to the hospital. Most adults of all ages recover. Your chance of being hospitalized or dying goes up with age and other illnesses. This information may change as we learn more.

## Are there special risks for children and adults with heart defects?

We do not know how this virus will affect children and adults with heart defects. Most heart centers have not yet seen any CHD patients with COVID-19. People with other kinds of heart problems are at higher risk. Many people with heart problems already have heart or lung weakness. This weakness may make it more dangerous to get the virus. We do not expect all people with heart defects to be at high risk.

### Heart problems that may put you or your child at higher risk:

- Very complex defects
- Single ventricle
- Low oxygen levels or being blue (cyanotic)
- Reduced heart strength or heart failure
- Heart rhythm problems
- Lung problems such as high lung pressure (pulmonary hypertension)
- Heart surgery within the last three months
- Heart transplant

## What other health problems may put me or my child at higher risk?

Obesity, diabetes, smoking, other birth defects, liver or kidney problems, or having a weak immune system may raise your risk. Asthma that requires frequent medication also may raise your risk. **Ask your heart care team if you have questions about the risk to you or your child.**

## Can heart devices (pacemakers, heart valves, stents, conduits (tubes), closure devices) get infected?

No. COVID-19 will not infect any kind of object in the heart or chest.

## Is there a vaccine or drug for COVID-19?

Right now there is no vaccine to prevent or treat COVID-19. Several drugs are being tried to see if they work and are safe.

## I/My child have a date for surgery soon. What should we do?

Right now most hospitals are doing only emergency and urgent surgeries. Some heart surgeries can be safely delayed without any major risks. You or your child may be safer if the operation is postponed for the time being. Contact the hospital where your surgery is scheduled to find out whether you or your child's surgery will be postponed.

### **Should I go to the clinic for my/my child's regular scheduled heart check-up?**

In general, do not go to the hospital for any regular visits. Routine check-ups and testing can be safely postponed. If you or your child have an urgent heart problem, contact your care team about next steps. If you are not sure whether the problem needs urgent attention, contact your doctor.

### **What can I do to protect myself or my child from COVID-19?**

- Stay home as much as possible
- Wash your hands with soap often with hot water or water that was boiled and cooled
- Use hand sanitizer frequently when outside your home
- Cough into your elbow
- Wear a face mask when outside
- Wipe surfaces that people touch with disinfectant
- Keep at least two meters (6 feet) from other people
- Keep yourself and/or your child away from any sick family member

### **Should I go to work or school if I have one of the high-risk heart conditions listed above?**

Anyone with a high-risk heart condition should stay home from work or school if at all possible. This is true even if you/your child feels well. If this is not possible, ask your heart team if there are things you can do to help you stay safe.

### **What should I do if I think my child or I might have COVID-19?**

If you, your child, or anyone in your household develops symptoms, immediately isolate the sick person. DO NOT rush to the hospital or clinic. Contact your heart team by phone to discuss. In most cases, fever and other symptoms will get better in a few days. If symptoms do not improve and become worse, ask your doctor for advice.

### **Are there any heart medicines that should be stopped because of COVID-19?**

Continue all regular heart medicines unless your doctor tells you otherwise. This includes blood thinners, blood pressure medicine, heart rhythm medicine, and vitamins. Contact your doctor if you have questions about medication.

### **What medications can be used to help with flu symptoms?**

Plain acetaminophen such as Tylenol, Paracetamol, Calpol, and Panadol can help with pain and fever. Ask your doctor before using other medications.

### **Are there other medications that people with COVID-19 should not take?**

If you think you or your child might have COVID-19, check with your doctor before using any medication. For example, people should not take asthma medicine without asking if it is safe first. Ask your doctor if you have any concerns about a specific medicine or its dosage.

### **What should I do if my/my child's heart condition gets worse?**

Immediately seek medical help if you or your child becomes more blue, more breathless, has a very fast heart-beat, or becomes drowsy. Go to the nearest hospital for further care. If possible, call in advance so they can prepare and plan the treatment.

**For the sources and additional resources please visit [global-arch.org](https://global-arch.org). This information sheet was released on April 3, 2020.**

