



Dedicated to the Prevention and Control of Hypertension Globally

World Hypertension League

In Official Relations with the International Society of Hypertension and
World Health Organization

COVID-19 Threat: Guidance for People with Hypertension

From the World Hypertension League

Background

This novel coronavirus affects the lungs and causes flu-like symptoms and pneumonia. It was first reported in China in late 2019 and has since spread worldwide. This outbreak has now been classified as a pandemic.

The main symptoms of this illness are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain

The virus is transmitted among people as contaminated air droplets released when infected individuals cough or sneeze. At present there is no available anti-viral medication or vaccine to combat or prevent this illness, so public health measures to prevent contact between unaffected people with active disease or who might be carriers remains the primary strategy for containment. Young, healthy, people affected by the virus usually experience a relatively mild illness, but older people – aged over 60 – and individuals with co-morbid conditions are more vulnerable to serious outcomes, including death.

Throughout the world, governmental agencies and other authoritative organizations are providing instruction to people on how best to protect themselves. The World Hypertension League is committed to supporting this vital task.

People with Hypertension

About one-third of adults have hypertension, also known as high blood pressure. Hypertension is a serious condition that strongly increases the risk of major heart events, strokes and kidney disease. Treating hypertension, usually with medications that reduce the blood pressure, significantly lowers the risk of these dangerous outcomes.

Important Note: So far there is no evidence that people with hypertension have a greater risk of serious COVID-19 infection than people who do not have hypertension -- the proportion of hypertensive people among COVID-19 patients is not higher than in the general population at the same age. Also, there is currently no evidence that the types of medications used to treat hypertension alter the probability of getting COVID-19 disease or changing its severity, so there is no need for people with hypertension to change their medications unless advised to do so by their doctors. All major health organizations are continuing to monitor this issue.

People with hypertension should observe the following rules for protecting themselves from the coronavirus.

General Recommendations

- Frequently wash hands with soap (at least 20 seconds) or if hand washing is not possible use an alcohol-based hand cleanser
- Avoid touching your face (eyes/nose/mouth)
- If you cough or sneeze do it into a tissue (and then discard it) or into the inside of your arm
- Use household cleaning sprays or wipes to clean commonly touched objects, for instance your mobile phone!
- Avoid people with illness who might be affected by the virus (fever/cough/shortness of breath)
- If you have these symptoms yourself, remain as isolated as possible; if you can, inform your own doctor or source of healthcare in advance of going in person to a medical facility
- Maintain social distance (about two meters or six feet) even from people who appear to be healthy
- Avoid crowded places. This includes buses and trains, although sometimes it can be difficult to find alternatives when needing to get to work or to provide care for another person in need

Focused Recommendations for People with Hypertension

- Continue taking your blood pressure medications as prescribed
- If possible, measure your blood pressure at home. It might become somewhat lower or higher than usual, but if possible do not change your treatment without first talking to your doctor or clinic. Remember: low blood pressure can result from poor hydration – see the next bullet.
- Keep hydrated. Many people, particularly older adults, do not consume adequate fluids. Make up a schedule to ensure that throughout the day you drink fluids on a regular basis.
- Physical activity: Because many of us will spend more time at home to minimize exposure to the virus, it is likely we will also reduce physical activity. If possible, find ways to exercise and increase physical activity within your home. One other solution: going for walks outside the home, provided social distance is maintained, is a healthy and even morale-boosting activity during difficult times

People with Hypertension at High Risk

Some people with hypertension are at a particularly high risk of the complications of hypertension as well as from the COVID-19 flu. The following situations require special attention.

- Older individuals (over 60) are at increased risk of poor outcomes from the COVID-19 flu as well as from their hypertension. Be particularly vigilant in observing our recommendations. Do not hesitate to get medical help if you develop symptoms.
- A previous heart condition, stroke or kidney disease: Be careful to take all your prescribed medications, follow all the recommendations already given and be prepared – if necessary – to actively seek medical help
- Diabetes and high cholesterol (lipid disorders): People with hypertension quite often have diabetes and abnormal cholesterol. It is very important to keep taking all prescribed medications and follow all our general recommendations, including proper hydration and physical activity, to counteract the increased risk of the COVID-19 flu and heart complication. If you have diabetes please also read the special instructions provided through the World Health Organization for patients with diabetes.

- Chronic obstructive lung disease, asthma, and being a current or former smoker: People with these conditions are all predisposed to extra vulnerability to COVID-19 and to the complications of hypertension. Be very sensitive to changes in how you feel, especially worsening of lung symptoms – shortness of breath/cough – and seek medical help rapidly.

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