



Updated COVID-19 Questions and Answers

What is ACHA Doing?

ACHA encourages adults with congenital heart disease (CHD) to take advantage of the many resources the organization has prepared in response to COVID-19. These include webinars and a health information webpage, www.achaheart.org/COVID19, that is reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

ACHA's [Heart to Heart Peer Mentors](#) are also available to provide individual support, guidance and additional resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. This program offers our members the chance to connect with another CHD patient or family member in a positive and supportive way.

Risk:

Is someone with CHD/adult congenital heart disease (ACHD) at a higher risk for complications if they contract COVID-19?

- There is little additional information about CHD patients and COVID-19.
 - Patients diagnosed with CHD should continue the best practices from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding [social distancing](#) and [wearing face masks](#).

What if I am see my ACHD cardiologist regularly and I am in overall good health? Should I be concerned with CHD and COVID-19?

- Patients with cardiac and pulmonary disease are [at an increased risk](#) of developing symptoms with COVID-19, but this doesn't mean that everyone who has CHD will contract COVID-19. That said, we strongly suggest taking precautions.

What if I haven't seen an ACHD provider in over a year?

- We encourage you to contact your primary care and ACHD provider and discuss the risks of COVID-19 and further cardiac care.
 - There may be options for a telemedicine visit, which is visiting your provider(s) from your home with a computer/tablet/phone. You can then discuss your risks for COVID-19 with your healthcare team and if/when you need to see them in person to continue to manage your CHD.

Does a CHD patient who is in very good health and conditioning tolerate the disease better than someone in poorer general health?

- COVID-19 is a new disease. Currently there is limited data and information about the impact of underlying medical conditions and whether they increase the risk for severe illness from COVID-

19. Based on [what we know at this time](#), people with CHD **might be at an increased risk** for severe illness from COVID-19.

Does ejection fraction or cardiac output play a role in determining whether I might have complications if I get COVID-19?

- Some patients with cardiac and pulmonary disease are at an increased risk of developing symptoms with COVID-19, but ACHA recommends speaking with your ACHD team to discuss your specific concerns about COVID-19.

Is there a reason to be MORE concerned about coronavirus than about common flu?

- Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2) and flu is caused by infection with [influenza viruses](#). Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis. Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some key differences between the two.
- While more is learned every day, there is still a lot that is unknown about COVID-19 and the virus that causes it.
- This [information from the CDC](#) provides differences between the flu and COVID-19.

How long is someone contagious with the flu and COVID-19? The CDC [shared the following information](#):

- Flu
 - Most people with flu are contagious for about 1 day before they show symptoms.
 - Older children and adults with flu appear to be most contagious during the initial 3-4 days of their illness but many remain contagious for about 7 days.
 - Infants and people with weakened immune systems can be contagious for even longer.
- COVID-19
 - *How long someone can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 is still under investigation.*
 - It's possible for people to spread the virus for about 2 days before experiencing signs or symptoms and remain contagious for at least 10 days after signs or symptoms first appeared. If someone is asymptomatic or their symptoms go away, it's possible to remain contagious for at least 10 days after testing positive for COVID-19.

Transmission

What is COVID-19 and how is it transmitted to others?

- There are many other types of coronavirus, and many produce mild symptoms. According to the CDC, a novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified and is not the same as the coronavirus strains previously seen in humans.
- In February 2020, the World Health Organization classified the novel coronavirus as COVID-19 with symptoms ranging from no symptoms, mild symptoms and in some cases very severe illness requiring hospitalization, and sometimes even death.
- COVID-19 is [spread from person to person through respiratory droplets](#). When an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, these droplets can be inhaled into the lungs of those in close contact. Some recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

Variants

- Viruses can always be expected to mutate into different variants. This means they change into a different form of the virus.
- Vaccines and protecting yourself against the spread of infection are the best ways to slow the development of new variants.
- Other variants include the Alpha variant, the Beta variant, and the Gamma variant.

Delta is the variant in the United States that public health officials are most concerned about.

- It is more infectious and spreads faster than most other variants.
- It is suggested that the Delta variant causes more severe illness in unvaccinated people than other variants.
- Breakthrough infections in vaccinated people are occurring but occur less often than in unvaccinated people. Vaccinated people who have COVID-19 symptoms can spread it to others. We do not know if fully vaccinated people with asymptomatic COVID-19 can spread the virus.

Vaccines

- Vaccines against COVID-19 are the best way to protect your family and community.
- Vaccines work to prevent people from getting COVID-19, becoming very ill and possibly dying.
- The CDC recommends that everyone 12 years and older get fully vaccinated.
 - High numbers of people who are fully vaccinated reduce the spread of the virus and help to prevent the development of new variants.
- Vaccines that are FDA-approved for Emergency Use or fully FDA approved are highly effective against COVID-19 and the Delta variant. At this time, it is not known how the vaccines will work against other new variants.
- There are currently three COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States. None contain live virus and can give you COVID-19. They all tell your body how to respond when exposed to COVID-19. All might have minor side effects.
 - The Pfizer-BioNTech, a messenger RNA (mRNA vaccine), is fully authorized in the United States for ages 16 and above and has Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for ages 12-16. Full vaccination requires two vaccines three weeks apart.
 - Moderna is also an mRNA vaccine. It has EUA approval for ages 18 and older. Two vaccines are given 28 days apart to be considered fully vaccinated.
 - Johnson & Johnson Janssen vaccine uses an inactivated adenovirus or common cold virus. It requires one dose and has EUA approval.

ACHA Medical Advisory Board COVID-19 Vaccine Recommendations

- Any adult with congenital heart disease (CHD), their family members, and everyone who is caring for someone with CHD, should be fully vaccinated with one of the COVID-19 vaccines.
- If you have any of the following, you are at the highest risk of death or severe illness, and it is very important that you get fully vaccinated:
 - Eisenmenger syndrome
 - pulmonary hypertension
 - cyanotic CHD
 - heart failure
 - kidney problems
 - arrhythmias

- If you have any questions, [follow the CDC's guidelines](#) and speak to your healthcare team.

Precautions/Being Outside of my Home

How can I [best protect myself from getting COVID-19](#)?

- Get the vaccine.
- If you are in one of the following categories, wear a well-fitted mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as the Delta and other variants. The mask must cover your nose, mouth and chin to be effective.
 - All unvaccinated people indoors at all times.
 - Fully vaccinated people indoors in areas of high transmission.
 - People with a weakened immune system.
 - People who because of age or an underlying medical condition who are at increased risk for severe disease.
 - If someone in your household has a weakened immune system.
 - If you have a condition or take medicines that weaken your immune system.
- Stay at least 6 feet from other (known as social distancing).
 - Remember that some recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.
- Wash your hands often for at least 20 seconds. This includes fronts and backs and under the fingernails. If you don't have soap, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Don't touch your mouth, nose and eyes before you wash your hands.
- Avoid contact with people in your home who are sick and/or who test positive for COVID-19

As a CHD and high-risk patient, [how can I protect myself when I must go out](#) (like to grocery store, doctor's offices, etc.)?

- There is no way to ensure a zero risk of getting COVID-19, but it is important to know your risks and to practice prevention techniques. Your risk of getting COVID-19 can increase in a variety of ways:
 - The more time you spend with people who may be infected (people may be infected but have no symptoms).
 - The closer you are to people who may be infected.
 - How long you interact with people who may be infected.
- In addition, stay home as much as you can but if you must go out, the CHD suggests that you:
 - Wear a cloth face covering and keep tissues and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol with you whenever you go out.
 - Avoid people who are not wearing cloth face coverings and/or ask them to put a mask on.
- Your level of risk can also be determined by [looking at your community](#). Is there local spread? What are the local orders in your community? Will I be put in close contact with others where I am going? Is someone I am living with at high risk? Do I practice prevention in my daily life? Will I need to share items with others? Do I need to take public transportation? Do I have to travel outside of my local community to attend the activity? Will I have to miss school or work if I get COVID-19? If I get COVID-19, do I know what to do to prevent it from spreading to others?
 - The CDC offers [great information regarding all of these questions](#).

Limiting risk to others is important when a family member returns to work, especially if someone who is high risk lives in the house. It may be necessary to take extra steps to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 from a partner who works outside the home. Decisions around intimacy or self-quarantine are personal. You and your significant other should discuss this and decide what works best for you and your family. You can also check with your ACHD cardiologist for specific and individualized guidance.

Below are some ways the family member can keep others safe when returning to work:

- Leave all jewelry, watches, ties, scarfs and other non-essential accessories at home.
- Check your temperature daily and be alert for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer often during the day and before leaving work.
- Wear a face covering at work and other personal protective equipment (PPE) as indicated.
- Keep disinfecting wipes in the car and wipe down your hands, keys and phone before entering the house.
- Upon arriving home, take off your shoes before entering the house, and then take off your clothes immediately and put them in a cloth bag. Wash the clothes and bag immediately. Wipe the shoes down completely (top, sides, and soles) with disinfectant before touching clean clothes or bringing them into the house.
- Take a shower and put on clean clothes and shoes before coming in contact with other family members.
- Do not share eating or drinking utensils, [or even food](#), with other members of your family.

What precautions should I take outside my home?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds (sing Happy Birthday two times), especially after being in a public place, blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Rub your palms together with soap and water, wash the back of your hands, between your fingers and under your fingernails and rinse well.
- Use hand sanitizer with an alcohol content of at least 60% if soap and water are not available. Other times to wash your hands include:
 - Before making and/or eating food.
 - Before touching your face.
 - After going to the bathroom.
 - After touching your cloth face covering.
 - After changing a child's or adult's diaper.
 - After taking care of a sick person.
 - After touching pets or other animals.
- Everyone over the age of two should [wear a well-fitted face covering](#) when out in public and around people who are not in your household, particularly in situations where you cannot maintain social distancing.
- Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet (two arm's length) from people who do not live in your house and from someone in your house who is sick.
- Cover sneezes and coughs with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the garbage can and wash your hands afterwards.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces every day. These include doorknobs, light switches, handles, phones, keyboards, faucets, sinks, countertops, toilets and tables, among other things. Wash with soap and water first and then disinfect.

Is it safe for me to go back to work?

- This is a decision you will need to make with your family members and ACHD team. They will help you to determine what your specific risk of going back to work is.
- This is decision that will need to be made individually.
- [According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC), anyone with a condition listed by the CDC as high risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 may request an accommodation at work if the employer has 15 or more employees. CHD falls under this category. Things you can ask for include personal protective equipment, putting up barriers like plexiglass and/or increasing space between employees, modifying work schedules and responsibilities to lessen contact with others, or moving your workspace.

Is it safe to go for a walk, hike or run outside?

- Walking, [running](#) and/or hiking outside during the pandemic can be important for your physical and mental wellbeing.
- Walking or running alone is still the best way to reduce your risk of catching COVID-19. Avoid walking, running or hiking in groups. But if you do run, walk, or hike with others, it is still crucial to follow the social distance guidelines of at least six feet. This will cut down the chance that droplets from others due to heavy breathing will spread to you.

Anxiety and Stress

What steps can I take to lessen my anxiety and stress related to COVID-19?

- Social distance but don't socially isolate. Connect with family and friends via email, Zoom or telephone etc.
- Get adequate rest and eat a balanced diet.
- Get exercise—walk inside or outside, dance, check out online yoga that you can do in your house.
- There has been a lot of information through the internet and a variety of websites regarding COVID-19.
 - Only read information from trusted sources (ACHA, CDC, your ACHD team, etc.).
 - Help stop the spread of rumors regarding COVID-19.
- The CDC has a [variety of information](#) regarding stress, anxiety and COVID-19.
- ACHA provided information regarding COVID-19 and stress:
 - ACHA Webinar: [Stress Management in ACHD in Challenging Times](#)
 - ACHA Webinar: [Psychosocial Effects of Physical Isolation in Response to a Pandemic](#)
 - ACHA Webinar: [Moving Forward from Quarantine: How Does This Affect Mental Health in the ACHD Patient?](#)
 - ACHA HeartTalk blog: [“COVID-19 and the Impact on ACHD Patients,”](#) by Christy Sillman

Going to the Doctor and Urgent Issues

If I have symptoms, what should I do?

- Contact your primary care provider (PCP) and ACHD cardiologist to discuss your symptoms and follow their instructions regarding care and getting tested for COVID-19.
- Follow the recommendations provided by the CDC, which include staying home, isolating from other members of your household, getting plenty of rest, staying hydrated and managing symptoms with over-the-counter medicine (if approved by your PCP and/or ACHD team).
- If you develop any of the emergency warning signs, such as trouble breathing, pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, excessive fatigue or bluish lips and face, seek emergency medical care.

- Visit [this CDC website for more information](#), which includes a symptom checker that can help you make an appropriate decision and know when to see medical care.

I am scheduled for my annual appointment with my ACHD cardiologist. Should I keep my appointment?

- Contact your provider to discuss the timing from your last visit, need for imaging and the need for an in-person visit or the option for a telemedicine clinic appointment.

I am a high-risk patient, should I keep all my other doctor's appointments?

- Contact all doctors including, PCPs, dentists, allergists, rheumatologists, orthopedists, etc. to discuss your options for a telemedicine appointment or the option to wait to come into the office.
- It is important to discuss your other relevant appointments with your ACHD cardiologist as well.