



## FACT SHEET for people with underlying conditions

# Novel coronavirus: Recommendations for people with underlying conditions that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19

This fact sheet addresses questions asked by people with underlying conditions that make them more vulnerable to a severe case of COVID-19. They are relevant for people with a chronic, noncommunicable disease as well as those with a weakened immune system (immunosuppression).

### 1. Does my underlying condition mean I'm especially vulnerable to COVID-19?

COVID-19 Ordinance 2 defines vulnerable groups as people aged 65 and over and adults with the following conditions: high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases, conditions and therapies that weaken the immune system, and cancer. [Annex 6 \(in German\)](#) to COVID-19 Ordinance 2 contains a list, updated on an ongoing basis, of the people deemed to be vulnerable according to the latest scientific findings. Please talk to your doctor if you're not sure whether you belong to a vulnerable group.

### 2. Overweight or obese: Does being overweight or obese also mean I'm vulnerable?

Yes, if you are obese and your body mass index (BMI\*) is 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or more, you are vulnerable.

Studies suggest that obese people can get more seriously ill with COVID-19. Since obesity often occurs together with other underlying conditions such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc., this observation may be due in large part to these underlying conditions.

Current analyses, however, indicate that people with obesity class III (morbid, BMI greater than or equal to 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) suffer more severe cases of COVID-19 regardless of other underlying conditions. The FOPH updates the categories of vulnerable people on an ongoing basis. On the basis of the latest studies the FOPH judges people with a BMI of over 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup> to be more vulnerable to a severe case of COVID-19.

\*The BMI is a measure of obesity representing the ratio of body weight to height.

### 3. If I'm a vulnerable person with an underlying condition, how do I protect myself?

You should protect yourself, because getting infected with the novel coronavirus can be particularly dangerous for you, and the virus can make you more seriously ill. For this reason you must follow the [FOPH recommendations](#) and stay at home whenever possible. Always keep to the [rules on hygiene and social distancing](#).

**Keep a particularly close eye on your state of health!** If you have health problems, whether or not they're connected with the novel coronavirus, contact your doctor. Doctors and hospitals have taken the relevant precautions, so you can continue to receive treatment safely without the risk of infection.

If you have [symptoms of COVID-19 disease](#), call your doctor or a health centre/hospital immediately, even at the weekend. Mention that you are in a vulnerable group.



**In the event of [a suspected heart attack or stroke \(in German\)](#), call 144 for an ambulance, even during the coronavirus crisis.** Medical care is still provided in a cardiovascular emergency. These are emergencies, and every minute counts.

If you have general questions or are unsure about anything in relation to your condition and the novel coronavirus, the [health league](#) (in German) specialised in your condition will also be glad to help.

**Take care of yourself and your body.** A healthy lifestyle helps strengthen your body and immune system. [Daily exercise](#), [a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables \(in German\)](#), [giving up smoking](#), [reducing or avoiding consumption of alcohol](#) and [getting enough sleep \(in German\)](#) are key.

**Also look after your mental and emotional health.** The current situation is challenging mentally and emotionally and can be a strain. So it's all the more important to do whatever you can to actively take care of your [mental and emotional wellbeing](#).

*You'll find recommendations on how to do this in the FOPH's [Recommendations for everyday life](#).*

#### **4. What should I make sure to do in terms of my therapy?**

##### **Medication:**

- Talk to your doctor if you have questions about your medication. Don't stop taking medicine of your own accord.
- Make sure that you have a least one month's reserves of your medication at home. Ask relatives, neighbours, a friend or a [support organisation](#) for help with getting medicines or use a pharmacy's delivery service.

##### **Appointments with health professionals:**

- Contact your doctor to find out whether you should or can keep the appointments you've made and how to plan the further course of therapy and treatment.
- Don't postpone appointments for vaccinations. It's important not to forget these.
- Let your doctor know how you are doing in the current situation and where you want support and in what form.
- If you have to go to the doctor, go by car, bike or on foot. If that's not possible, take a taxi. Keep at least 2 metres away from other people.
- Therapies with other, non-medical healthcare professionals (nutritionists, physiotherapists, psychotherapists, etc.): Contact the provider in question and discuss how urgent the therapy is. Tell them how you are doing. Talk with them to find ways of continuing the therapy: by virtual consultation, exercises for you to do at home, special protective measures, etc.
- Look for offerings that will help you strengthen your resources and deal with your condition. Also ask your friends and relatives and other people around you whether they can recommend anything that will help.

#### **5. What offerings are available to help me cope with my condition in the current situation?**

- **High blood pressure and cardiovascular disease**  
[Cardiac helpline \(in German\)](#): 0848 443 278: For questions related to heart and cardiovascular diseases, prevention options, examination methods and treatments.



- **Chronic respiratory diseases**  
[Emergency lung disease hotline \(in German\)](#): The cantonal lung leagues are there to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **Diabetes**  
[Information for people affected by diabetes \(in German\)](#): You can contact [diabetesschweiz/diabètesuisse/diabetesvizzera](#) or the [regional diabetes societies](#): [Contact form or email](#).
- **Conditions and therapies that weaken the immune system**  
[Useful phone numbers for the coronavirus pandemic \(in German\)](#) from the Swiss Rheumatism League and a [fact sheet for people with weakened immune systems \(in German\)](#): Precautionary measures and behaviour during the COVID-19 epidemic for immune-suppressed patients of University Hospital Zurich.
- **Cancer**  
[Cancer helpline \(in German\)](#): 0800 11 88 11: This is a source of information and personal advice on questions relating to cancer (prevention, therapy, side-effects, palliative care and research). Naturally you can also call your cantonal or regional cancer league by phone.
- **Obesity**  
[Obesity helpline](#) (in German) by phone (044 251 54 13) or [email \(in German\)](#): For all questions relating to obesity, available from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.
- **Worry and anxiety**
  - [Virtual self-help groups \(in German\)](#): Especially during difficult times it's good to talk and share with other people. These hosted self-help groups are held every week.
  - [Corona Coaching \(in German\)](#): Need a sympathetic ear? Advice for anyone disconcerted and stressed by the current situation, confidential and free of charge.
  - [Strengthening emotional and mental health: Pro mente sana phone and e-advice \(in German\)](#): Specialists are there to answer your questions on legal and psychosocial matters, anonymously and free of charge.
  - [inCLOUsiv exchange platform \(in German\)](#): Virtual, interactive meeting place for anyone with an interest in mental health, providing space for sharing and dialogue, including information and articles updated on a daily basis, plus a forum and live discussion with professionals, sufferers and their families.
- **Addiction issues**
  - [Safezone \(in German\)](#): Find answers to questions related to drugs, alcohol and addiction issues – anonymous, free of charge, and with a choice of six modes of advice and support.
  - [Remote addiction advice](#): The GREA list contains details of the advice and support available to people with addictions and their families in this special situation.
  - [Dureschnufe \(in German\)](#): Social isolation can lead to risky addictive behaviours (gambling or excessive consumption of alcohol and other addictive substances). On the Dureschnufe site you'll find many different services if you have questions and need help.
- **Exercises for people with underlying conditions**
  - [Strengthen your muscles \(in German\)](#): Video training session from a medical therapist at the Swiss Heart Foundation.
  - [Keep moving \(in German\)](#): simple exercises you can do at home from the Rheumatism League.



- [Exercise! – But how? Exercise brochure \(in German\)](#) with animated explanations from the SAPS (Swiss Obesity Foundation).
- [Breathing exercises \(in German\)](#) and [information on how exercise can improve your breathing \(in German\)](#): Exercises from the Swiss Lung League.
- [Healthy living with a disability: exercise brochure](#) (in German) from Procap, with [many practical examples and recommendations \(in German\)](#) on exercise and diet.
- [Exercise tips for people over 65 and those with an underlying condition](#)

## 6. Under what circumstances can I go to work?

Whenever possible work from home to protect yourself from infection. Also try to avoid using public transport. Inform your employer about your health situation, and provide a medical certificate if they ask for one. Together you will need to find and agree on feasible solutions matching your personal situation and the possibilities available at your place of work. If the actual situation doesn't allow you to work from home and if no adequate measures to protect you are possible at the workplace, your [employer](#) must release you from duty with continued pay.

If you have questions on employment law, please consult the [SECO FAQ on private employment law \(in German\)](#).

*This fact sheet is regularly updated in line with the latest scientific findings and the needs arising in practice. Please also visit the FOPH website for information on the current state of affairs.*