



## FACT SHEET for people with underlying conditions

### New coronavirus:

## Recommendations for people with underlying conditions that mean they are at especially high risk for COVID-19

This fact sheet addresses questions asked by people with underlying conditions that mean they are at especially high risk for contracting 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 at especially high risk for COVID-19?

People aged 65 and over, pregnant women and adults with the following conditions are deemed to be at especially high risk: High blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, conditions and therapies that weaken the immune system and obesity class III (morbid, BMI greater than or equal to 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)<sup>1</sup>. The FOPH website contains a list, updated on an ongoing basis, of the people deemed to be at especially high risk according to the latest scientific findings. Please talk to your doctor if you're not sure whether you belong to a group deemed to be at especially high risk.

### 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 deemed to be at especially high risk. Studies suggest that obese people can get more seriously ill with COVID-19. Since obesity often occurs together with other underlying conditions (e.g. cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes), 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 people deemed to be at especially high risk 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 at greater risk of contracting a severe case of COVID-19.

### 3. If I'm at especially high risk and have an underlying condition, how do I protect myself?

You should protect yourself, as getting infected with the new 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 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 new coronavirus, contact your doctor. Doctors and hospitals have taken the relevant precautions, meaning you can continue to receive treatment safely without the risk of infection.

<sup>1</sup> \* The BMI is a measure of obesity representing the ratio of body weight to height.



If you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#), call your doctor or a hospital immediately, even at the weekend. Mention that you belong to a group deemed to be at especially high risk.

**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 new 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, giving up smoking, reducing or avoiding the consumption of alcohol and getting enough sleep are key. **Also look after your mental health.** The current situation is mentally challenging and can be a strain. It is therefore all the more important to do whatever you can to actively take care of your mental wellbeing.

*You'll find information on living in times of the new coronavirus and tips for everyday life 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 at least a one-month supply 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:

- Keep your scheduled appointments with your doctor.
- 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, avoid travelling at peak times on public transport or at the train station. If you nevertheless find yourself in places with a high volume of people and are unable to maintain the required distance, we recommend that you wear a face mask.
- Therapies with other, non-medical healthcare professionals (nutritionists, physiotherapists, psychotherapists, etc.): Keep these appointments wherever possible. Let the relevant specialist know how you are doing.
- 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**  
[Information](#) (in German) on COVID-19 for cardiovascular patients from the Swiss Heart Foundation and a [contact form](#) for questions (can be submitted in English) on cardiovascular diseases.
- **Diabetes**  
[Information for people affected by diabetes \(in German\)](#): You can contact diabetesschweiz/diabètesuisse/diabetesvizzera or the [regional diabetes societies: contact form or e-mail](#).
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Obesity**  
[Obesity helpline](#) (in German) by phone (044 251 54 13) or [e-mail \(in German\)](#): For all questions relating to obesity, available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 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 virtual self-help groups are hosted and 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?

Try to avoid using public transport at peak times. Inform your employer about your health situation. Together, you will need to find and agree on feasible solutions matching your personal situation and the possibilities available at your place of work. Your employer must ensure that your health is adequately protected under all circumstances by following the FOPH's [rules on hygiene and social distancing](#).

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.*