



National Indian Health Board  
**NATIONAL TRIBAL  
COVID-19 RESPONSE**

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## COVID-19 and People with Disabilities

Most people with disabilities are not inherently at higher risk of becoming infected with or having severe illness from COVID-19. However, some people with disabilities might be at a higher risk of infection or severe illness because of underlying medical conditions like chronic lung disease, a serious heart condition, or a weakened immune system. Adults with disabilities are three times more likely to have heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or cancer than adults without disabilities.

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### Who is at increased risk?

People with disabilities may be at increased risk of becoming infected or having unrecognized illness if they fall into one or more of the following categories:



- People who live in a long-term care facility or group residential home
- People who do not have access to handbasins, sinks, or water pumps to implement basic hygiene measures, including those living in rural areas with limited access to water
- People who have limited mobility or who cannot avoid coming into close contact with others who may be infected, such as direct support providers, caregivers, and family members
- People who have trouble understanding information or practicing preventative measures, such as hand washing and physical distancing
- People who may not be able to communicate if they are feeling sick

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### Lower risk of infection

In addition to practicing everyday preventive actions, people with disabilities who have direct support providers can help protect themselves from respiratory illness in the following ways:

- Ask the direct support provider if they are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19. Have a plan for additional or replacement support, that may include local agencies, family or friends.
- Tell the direct support provider to:
  - Wear a protective mask as the virus can be transmitted by someone without symptoms.
  - Wash their hands when they enter the home and before and after touching the client (e.g., dressing, bathing/showering, transferring, toileting, feeding), handling tissues, changing linens, laundry, etc.
  - Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces (e.g., counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, bedside tables), and equipment such as wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes, oxygen tanks and tubing, communication boards and other assistive devices.

## **Planning Ahead Checklist for People with Disabilities**

- Be aware of Medicaid policy changes for people with disabilities in your state that may be beneficial. Most states have modified some of their Medicaid Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) in response to COVID-19. Contact your HCBS provider for more information.
- Have a plan in place for what will be done if the direct support provider, or caregiver, gets sick.
- Create a contact list of family, friends, neighbors and local service agencies that can provide support in case the direct support provider or caregiver becomes ill or unavailable.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

- Plan at least two ways to communicate from home and work that can be used quickly in an emergency (e.g., landline phone, cell phone, text-messaging, email).
- Make sure to have these items:
  - Groceries and household and essential items to be comfortable staying home for a few weeks
  - At least a 30-day supply of over-the-counter and prescription medicines. Some health plans allow for a 90-day refill on prescription medications. Consider discussing this option with a healthcare provider. Make a photocopy of prescriptions, as this may help in obtaining medications in an emergency situation.
  - Medical equipment or supplies that may be needed.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People with Disabilities. [Available: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-disabilities.html>]

2. Administration for Community Living. Coronavirus Disease 2019. [Available: <https://acl.gov/COVID-19>]