



COVID-19 guidance for Women's Health - from the Women and Special Populations Committee of the AHA Council on Clinical Cardiology

Women and CVD

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases is rising rapidly in the U.S. New information and recommendations are released daily. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) ([link: https://www.cdc.gov/](https://www.cdc.gov/)) provides regular updates on how to protect yourself from COVID-19. The AHA provides updated guidance for patients with heart disease at heart.org.

More than 80% of infected patients experience mild symptoms and recover without needing to be hospitalized. People aged 65 years or older are at greater risk of developing severe illness although people can be affected at any age. Other risk factors for severe illness include known heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and chronic lung disease, even in younger people.^{1,2} Early reports from China and Italy suggest that men are at greater risk of severe illness than women. This may change as we learn more about the disease.^{3,4}

Women, especially women of color, are more likely to be caregivers— for older parents, young children, and those who may be infected with COVID-19. Prevention and self-care is critically important. Women with heart disease should know their risk.

I have heart disease - am I at risk?

We do not yet understand how different heart conditions contribute to COVID-19 risk for individuals. Women who have cardiac risk factors that are well-managed or heart disease that is asymptomatic generally have lower health risk than women who have symptomatic disease. Currently we do not have the answers to the following questions:

- What is the risk of COVID-19 in women with high blood pressure or diabetes that is well-managed?
- Are women with heart conditions still at higher risk of severe illness even if they are young and asymptomatic?
- What is the impact of having congenital heart disease or spontaneous coronary dissection on risk of COVID-19?

We are rapidly learning more about the impact of COVID-19 on different medical conditions. If you are concerned about your risk, talk to your health care provider. If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, participating in a research study can help us learn more about the disease, especially in women.

What if I have heart disease and I am pregnant?

Pregnant women do not appear to have more severe symptoms compared to the general public. It is too early to know if a mother with COVID-19 can pass it on her to baby. If you are pregnant and have heart disease, it is important to take precautions to protect yourself from getting sick. If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, call your ob-gyn and cardiologist. For updated information for pregnant women, visit the ACOG website ([link: https://www.acog.org/en/Topics/COVID-19](https://www.acog.org/en/Topics/COVID-19)).

Stress management is more important than ever

Self-care is important to manage stress and anxiety. Some tips to manage stress include: ([link: https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/3-tips-to-manage-stress](https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/3-tips-to-manage-stress))

- Keep up with friends and family by phone or online. Social distancing is not the same as social isolation
- Make time to exercise and clear your head
- Try to maintain your hobbies
- Participate in spiritual activities virtually. Many religious groups are gathering online.
- If you are feeling sad or overwhelmed, talk to your health care provider

Caring for your heart

Prevention is key

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure to the virus ([link to CDC?](#)). If you are concerned that you have symptoms of COVID-19, such as shortness of breath, cough or fever, contact your health care provider.

Take your medication as prescribed

If you have questions about your specific medications, talk to your healthcare provider. If you are taking medication for high blood pressure, diabetes, or a heart condition, do not stop or change your medication without talking to your healthcare provider. For more information visit the AHA website on “What People with High Blood Pressure Need to Know about Covid-19.” ([link: https://newsroom.heart.org/news/patients-taking-ace-i-and-arbs-who-contract-covid-19-should-continue-treatment-unless-otherwise-advised-by-their-physician](https://newsroom.heart.org/news/patients-taking-ace-i-and-arbs-who-contract-covid-19-should-continue-treatment-unless-otherwise-advised-by-their-physician))

Telehealth visits may be an option

Talk to your healthcare provider about substituting an in-person visit for a telehealth visit by phone or video. Many clinics and hospitals are delaying or rescheduling non-urgent cardiac tests, such as echocardiograms or stress tests. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have an upcoming test to determine whether any changes should be made.

Maintain healthy habits while staying safe

Even though your routine is disrupted, it's more important than ever to eat healthy, stay active, get enough sleep, and manage stress. For patients instructed to stay at home, make sure to take frequent breaks during the day to walk around the house. Try a new exercise or yoga class online. More information regarding Coronavirus can be found on the AHA's website regarding "Questions We All Have." (link: <https://www.heart.org/en/coronavirus/coronavirus-questions>)

If you have symptoms of heart attack or stroke, call 9-1-1 immediately

Call your cardiologist if you develop chest discomfort, shortness of breath, or other cardiac symptoms. If you have symptoms of a heart attack or stroke, it is important to get to a hospital right away. (link: <https://www.goredforwomen.org/en/about-heart-disease-in-women/signs-and-symptoms-in-women>).

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