

Epilepsy and COVID-19

People with epilepsy do not have a higher risk of getting COVID-19. Most people who get COVID-19 experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without complications. Practising good hygiene and taking precautions in poorly ventilated public spaces can help you avoid COVID-19.



If you test positive for COVID-19, you should talk to your doctor or specialist. This will help you understand any personal risk factors. You should also continue to follow your Epilepsy Management Plan and Emergency Medication Management Plan.

Will my seizures get worse if I get COVID-19?

Studies from areas that have experienced widespread COVID-19 outbreaks suggest that for most people with epilepsy, the likelihood of having increased seizures is low. However, the impact on overall health is higher due to stress, anxiety and worry.

Should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. The International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), the scientific body devoted to the study of epilepsy, recommends that people with epilepsy get the COVID-19 vaccine, including booster shots.

The ILAE believes the potential risks and complications associated with contracting COVID-19 are more significant than any possible vaccine side-effects. The current research indicates that the chance of having higher or more frequent seizures after a COVID-19 vaccination is low. Only a small number of people with epilepsy experience seizure complications after their vaccines.



What increases COVID-19 complications?

Some people with epilepsy have additional health concerns that increase their risk of complications following a COVID-19 infection. These include:

- **Medications:** Contact your doctor or pharmacist if you are concerned about your medication use in relation to COVID-19.
- **Other neurological conditions:** Your health and immunity are unique. Talk to your doctor about any pre-existing neurological conditions that could impact your immunity to, or recovery from, COVID-19.
- **Other pre-existing health conditions:** Health-related conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, lung or respiratory problems may increase the severity of COVID-19. If you are concerned that you or your loved one may be at increased risk, please speak to your doctor or specialist to check if specific medical precautions are needed.

Managing worry about COVID-19

If you have epilepsy, you may feel extra worried about how COVID-19 could impact your life. If you feel that you are constantly worrying about it, try some of the following strategies:

- Set daily routines - get up and go to bed at the same time, sit down for meals with family or housemates, take walks or exercise at set times.
- Build relaxing activities into your routines.
- Take a break from technology.

- Practice mindfulness techniques – meditation, deep breathing, quiet listening, tai chi, yoga or other activities.
- Stay connected with others by calling or visiting family or friends.
- If you usually see a counsellor to help with stress, worry or depression, keep this connection.

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

A rapid antigen test (RAT) is the easiest way to test yourself for COVID-19. You can get them online, at pharmacies, major supermarkets, and some petrol stations. You can also use a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, which is available through your doctor.

Most people with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms can be treated at home. If you do test positive, ask your doctor:

- Which over-the-counter anti-seizure medications are safe for my seizures?
- Can I use anti-viral medication?
- What do I do if symptoms change or don't get better?
- Should I also be tested for the flu?

When to get assistance

- Call your doctor if you develop shortness of breath, pain, rash, or other symptoms.
- If you live with other people:
 - Keep away from others.
 - Wear a mask when around other people in the house.
 - Stay in separate rooms.
 - Don't share food or utensils.
 - Use your own bathroom if possible, or clean your shared bathroom after use.
- If you help care for another person or your family, separate yourself physically in the home away from them. Get help from family, friends, home care agencies or volunteers.
- If seizures increase, call your neurologist or your child's paediatrician.

Call 000 for an ambulance:

- If it is the person's first seizure.
- If you do not know the person or if there is no Epilepsy Management Plan (EMP).
- If the seizure lasts for 5 minutes or more.
- If the seizure stops, but the person does not regain consciousness within 5 minutes.
- If another seizures begins.
- When a serious injury has occurred.
- If the person was eating or drinking, or there is food fluid or vomit in their mouth.
- If the seizure occurred in water.
- If you believe the person is pregnant or has diabetes.

Special thanks to Professor Sam Berkovic, Laureate Professor in the Department of Medicine of Melbourne, and Director of the Epilepsy Research Centre at Austin Health for his review of this resource.

This content is licensed from Epilepsy Foundation of America and cannot be reproduced or modified without the express written permission of Epilepsy Foundation of America.

Other resources

- **National Coronavirus Helpline**
Phone: 1800 020 080
Web: www.health.gov.au/contacts/national-coronavirus-helpline?language=und
- **World Health Organisation**
www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1
- **International League Against Epilepsy – COVID -19 FAQs**
www.ilae.org/patient-care/covid-19-and-epilepsy/for-patients/faqs-in-english

Epilepsy support

The National Epilepsy Support Service (NESS) is available Mon – Sat 9am – 7pm (AEST) to provide support and information across Australia. Phone: 1300 761 487. Email: support@epilepsysmart.org.au

Lived experience

We recognise all people living with epilepsy and the impact it has on their lives. We take a moment to acknowledge the lived experience they have shared with us. In sharing their stories, we acknowledge the strength and resilience people living with epilepsy have shown in the face of not getting a fair go.

A medical note

The information contained in this publication provides general information about epilepsy. It does not provide specific advice. Specific health and medical advice should always be obtained from a qualified health professional.

Epilepsy Smart Australia Program

National Epilepsy Support Service 1300 761 487

Website epilepsysmart.org.au



Australian Government
Department of Health

The Epilepsy Smart Australia Program received funding from the Australian Government.

Information provided in this document is for education and training purposes only and not for the provision of medical advice or clinical care. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the Epilepsy Foundation is not liable for any loss, damage, liability, cost or expense (including any legal cost and expense) arising directly or indirectly from the use of this information in connection with the provision of medical advice or clinical care.

This resource is CAL exempt. © Copyright Epilepsy Foundation, 2024.