

What if I Get Seriously Ill with COVID-19?

Life-Support Treatments and Complications

This document goes with the “*Be Prepared in the Time of COVID-19*” guide, and provides additional information about life-support treatments related to COVID-19. The information is meant to help you think about how you would want to be cared for if you became seriously ill with COVID-19.

It is important to know that most people will not need these treatments if they become sick with COVID-19, but planning ahead and being informed about possible treatments is important.

Please speak with your doctor/healthcare provider if you have specific wishes about life-support treatments you would or would not want. They may write you a medical order called a **Goals of Care Designation** and give you the completed form so that your wishes are known in an emergency.

Visit www.conversationsmatter.ca for more information (click on ‘Patients and Families’ and then ‘Resources’).



What we know about people who get sick with COVID-19

- Most people with COVID-19 recover on their own while self-isolating at home
- A small number of people become sick enough to need care in a hospital. A few of them become seriously ill and may need to be admitted to hospital intensive care (ICU)
- Older adults and people with existing medical conditions are more likely to become seriously ill with COVID-19 and have a higher risk of dying

There is currently no cure for COVID-19.

The goal of treatment is to give your body the chance to fight the virus.



How does admission to an ICU help someone seriously ill with COVID-19?

Admission to ICU allows for care and treatments that are not available elsewhere in a hospital, including:

- Constant monitoring with machines and specialized healthcare providers
- A breathing tube connected to a breathing machine (a ventilator)
- A period of sedation (medically-induced coma) if needed



Possible complications following discharge from ICU

- Memory problems, concentrations problems, emotional changes
- Trouble performing simple tasks such as cooking, cleaning, making phone calls
- Permanent lung damage from being on a ventilator for a long period of time
- Infections



Why people seriously ill with COVID-19 may be treated with a ventilator

- People seriously ill with COVID-19 find it difficult to breathe on their own
- A ventilator pushes air through a tube directly into a person's lungs
- The ventilator may keep them alive long enough for their body to fight the disease

How well does ventilation work?

- Many people seriously ill with COVID-19 who are put on a ventilator do not survive
- Those who survive may never return to their previous health
- The longer people are on a ventilator the more likely they are to have a poor outcome or die



What is cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)?

CPR is an emergency procedure used if you stop breathing or your heart stops beating. It can include:

- Pressing forcefully on your chest and possibly breathing into your mouth
- Electrical shock and drugs to try and start your heart

How well does cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) work?

- Very few people of all ages survive CPR in hospital
- CPR can cause injuries, such as broken ribs or bruised lungs
- People who survive CPR often need ICU care and a ventilator afterwards
- About half of the people who survive CPR are left with brain damage and ongoing serious health issues



Who is most likely to be helped by a ventilator or CPR?

- People who were mostly healthy before becoming seriously ill with COVID-19
- Those who only need a ventilator for a short time (days or a week or two)

Who is less likely to be helped by a ventilator or CPR?

- Those who have heart, lung, liver, or kidney problems
- Those who have a terminal illness, such as advanced cancer or advanced dementia
- Those who are older or very frail

Talk with your doctor or healthcare provider about your own health, COVID-19, and how these treatments and their risks might impact you.

Disclaimer: This information is based on clinical studies and the experience of healthcare providers, it does not replace professional medical advice.



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