

ADVISORY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY DURING COVID-19

While the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic threatens all members of society, persons with disabilities (PwDs) are disproportionately impacted due to attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that are reproduced in the COVID-19 response.¹ While disability alone does not increase susceptibility to COVID-19, people with disabilities who need close contact with caregivers, or have difficulty wearing a mask or frequently washing their hands, are at greater risk of contracting the disease. Where disability is attended with conditions such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or obesity, there is greater risk of severe illness due to COVID-19.

In March 2020, the Central Government declared the COVID-19 pandemic as a national disaster in India. There is concern over indications that the death rate of persons with disabilities could be two to four times higher than that of persons without disabilities (based on recent Japanese data)². The disability toll in the COVID-19 pandemic has been just as devastating. Studies show that people with disabilities make up 6 in 10 of COVID-19 related deaths,³ and Intellectual disability is second only to old age as a risk factor for dying from COVID-19⁴.

This advisory has been prepared with inputs from WHO considerations, health professionals and experts in the disability sector.

For whom is this advisory?

1. All persons with disabilities including those covered under benchmark disabilities, as per the law
2. Caregivers of PwDs
3. Government

Under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016):

- A *person with disability* means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society equally with others;
- A *person with benchmark disability* means a person with not less than 40% of a specified disability; and
- A *person with disability having high support needs* means a person with benchmark disability duly certified as needing high support.

FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Reduce your potential exposure to COVID-19

Do's	Don't's
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work from home, if possible• Try to get caregivers to stay with you for this temporary phase till the second wave cases subside	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid crowded environments to the maximum extent possible• Minimize physical contact with

¹Covid-19 And The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities: Guidance, OHCHR, United Nations, April 29, 2020

²<http://www.riglobal.org/sendai-statement-to-promote-disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction-for-resilient-inclusive-and-equitable-societies-in-asia-and-the-pacific/>

³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/24januaryto20november2020>

⁴<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/03/210305123809.htm>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before any form of physical contact, such as for transfers etc, ensure both you and the caregiver either wash or sanitise your hands properly • If meeting is essential, maintain proper distance • Maintain hygiene by washing hands(if hand wash is not possible- sanitise frequently) and wear mask in the presence of others • Ensure that assistive products, if used, are cleaned and disinfected frequently; these include wheelchairs, walking canes, walkers, transfer boards, white canes, or any other device that is frequently handled and used in public spaces 	<p>other people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid having visitors at home except caregivers who support activities of daily living
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Get yourself vaccinated against COVID – 19

- It is important to get vaccinated
- Before vaccination consult your doctor regarding the following:
 - Any relevant underlying health conditions that may cause issues or higher risks with vaccination
 - Any on-going medication that you may need to stop or reduce prior to vaccination
 - Any particular recommended vaccine for your condition
 - If you are planning a child, then what is recommended
 - When to go for vaccination, as crowded spaces are possible sites of infection
 - Understand possible risks & allergic reactions to vaccination and what to do in such a situation
- Before enlisting for vaccination do the following:
 - Identify if you can or cannot travel to the vaccination centre
 - Connect with local disability organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) and disability service providers for support in identifying accessible vaccination sites and assistance with transportation
 - Undertake self-advocacy, where needed for drive in vaccination or home based vaccination services
- Follow all the protocols once you are vaccinated (e.g. completing vaccine dosage at appropriate intervals and taking all due precautions such as wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing in public areas, etc.)

Put a plan in place to ensure continuation of the care and support you need

- Make sure you have up to two weeks of all your regular medicines that you may require
- If you rely on caregivers, increase the pool of those you can call upon, in case your regular caregiver becomes unwell or needs to self-isolate
- Identify disability NGOs/ DPOs in your community that you can access if you need help.

Prepare your household for the instance you should contract COVID-19

- Inform family, friends and caregivers of:
 - Your regular doctor's contact details
 - Your COVID-19 treating doctor's contact details
 - Your health insurance information and where its papers/card is
 - Location of your medical papers in your house
 - Ensure to keep a trusted neighbour in your support circle
 - Share contact information of your caregivers, main family & friends with each of them, so that they can connect with each other for your support
 - Ensure mechanism of cooked food supply

- Know the telephone number of relevant health services and hotlines, should you have questions or require non-urgent medical assistance

Minimize stress and be prepared for emergencies

- Be prepared and know in advance:
 - Where and how to get practical help if needed for taxi, ambulance, helplines & voluntary groups helping in finding oxygen & beds etc.
 - Numbers for caregiver services
 - Numbers for ICU set-up at home, if needed
 - Remember to share these numbers with your support group of caregivers, family & friends
- Minimize watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes you to feel anxious or distressed
- Seek information only from trusted sources and mainly so that you can take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones.
- Get the facts; not rumours and misinformation

FOR CAREGIVERS

Dos	Dont's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must wear a double mask to cover nose and mouth and wash their hands each time before they give the required assistance and afterwards • Follow the general rules of masking, hand washing, sanitizing and social distancing as stringently as possible. • Caregivers who have been in contact with anyone who has shown possible symptoms of the flu or COVID-19, even if they themselves are not symptomatic, should keep their distance from the person with disability they care for. • If a person with disability becomes sick, seek medical advice immediately as they are at greater risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregivers who are feeling unwell should stay away from the person with disability they care for

FOR GOVERNMENT

Dos	Dont's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During lockdown, essential services such as ration and medicines should be provided at door steps of persons with disabilities • E-passes for caregivers should be allowed through online portal of state governments • Vaccination drive by government shall ensure transportation service for persons with high support needs from home to vaccination centre and back • For women with disabilities, in addition to medicines, both for COVID-19 cure and regular well being; sanitary napkins shall be provided at door steps • Free of cost gas cylinders should be provided to PwDs families which are under BPL • COVID+ PwDs and their families should get free of cost treatment • Monthly release of disability pension to PwDs shall be ensured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not get the hospital beds emptied from COVID+ PwDs • Do not curtail medicines, meals and oxygen cylinders supply to COVID+ PwDs in hospitals