



April 2020

Covid19 outbreak – Recommendations on self-care for people living with diabetes

Background

The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19 virus is thought to spread **mainly** from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 1-2 metres).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes. Current evidence suggests that novel coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. On the other hand, transmission of the novel coronavirus to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been clearly demonstrated

It is highly likely that older people and those with pre-existing and severe medical conditions such as diabetes are at higher risk of serious illness if they become infected with COVID-19.

General recommendations

- **Stay up to date** by checking the coronavirus pages of the Ministry for Health: www.covid19health.gov.mt or the Department of Information website on www.covid19malta.info.
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, before preparing and/or eating food, before and after going to the bathroom and on returning home from outside.
- If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains 70% alcohol**. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they air dry.

- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.** Throw used tissues in the lidded trash bin. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- **Regularly clean frequently touched objects and surfaces** with regular household detergent and water. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. Allow enough contact time as indicated by the detergent's manufacturer.
- **Avoid contact with anyone who is ill.**
- Take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others. Practice physical distancing by keeping 2m away from others. Refrain from frequenting public places. Avoid direct physical social contact practices such as hugs and handshakes.
- If you are ill, stay at home, even if your symptoms are mild. DO NOT GO to work until 24hrs after symptoms have subsided.

Specific recommendations

- **Protect yourself:** Avoid leaving home during this time when coronavirus is circulating within the community.
- **Activate your social networks:** Contact family, friends, neighbours, local pharmacist, local grocer etc. so that you can make plans to receive any food or medication supply that you need while you are isolating at home or you become ill.
- **Keep updated and educate yourself from trusted sources.** Remember that not everything you hear from social media is factual. Follow the HPDPMalta social media pages for evidence based up to date information.
- **Have enough groceries and household items for 2 to 4 weeks.**
- **Eat well.** Eating well is the key to managing blood sugar. Eat healthy foods in the right amounts at the right times so that your blood sugar stays in your target range as much as possible. Make sure that you balance the proteins, fats and carbs you eat to manage your diabetes and eat well. Consult the resources provided by your dietician or diabetes nurse. Make every effort not to gain weight during this period of isolation at home.
- **Keep hydrated.** It is important to drink around 1.5L to 2L of plain water every day, unless your doctor has advised you otherwise.
- **Keep active.** Being physically active is very important for people living with diabetes. Physical activity helps to control blood sugar and lowers the risk of heart disease and nerve damage. It

also helps to maintain a healthy weight and to improve your mood. The aim is to fit in at least 30 minutes of activity every day. Follow exercise classes online or on television, or else plan your own routine. Include activities which make your heart beat faster and your breathing deeper, as well as stretching exercises.

- **Reduce anxiety:** At this time of uncertainty, it can be easy to become anxious and allow your mental health to suffer. In order to protect your mental health:
 - Limit the news and be careful what you read; have a specific time when you read or listen to the news. In order to reduce listening to misinformation, use only trusted sites.
 - Have breaks from social media and mute groups or sites which may act as triggers for anxiety or panic attacks.
 - Follow regular schedules for waking up, dressing, eating, exercising, working, entertainment and going to sleep.
 - Establish objectives for each day as well for the whole week.
 - Limit caffeine intake.
 - Stay connected with those people you care about.
 - Sit outside in your balcony, yard, roof or near a window to enjoy daylight and sunshine.
 - Exercise regularly.

Psychological support is available 24/7 for those who need it on the **1770** helpline.

- **Glucose self-monitoring:** Check your blood glucose levels according to the schedule recommended by your doctor or nurse. Your target blood glucose level is usually 4 to 6 mmol/L before meals and below 7.8 mmol/L two hours after meals. Keep a record of the levels to help you when consulting your doctor or nurse.
- **Blood pressure self-monitoring:** If you suffer from high blood pressure, continue to monitor regularly if you have a blood pressure monitor at home. Monitor once a week while sitting down. Keep a record of the levels to help you when consulting your doctor or nurse.
- **Tobacco use:** Giving up tobacco is one of the best things you can do for your health. Covid-19 is mainly a disease of the lungs, and so quitting or reducing tobacco use can help to reduce the risk from the coronavirus. Quitting can be hard but getting the right support will make it easier. Call the tobacco quitline on 8007 3333 to get help from trained professionals by telephone.
- **Medications:** Make sure that you have enough medication for 2 to 4 weeks. Contact your pharmacy or POYC if you need home delivery of your medications as you should be isolating at

home. Keep a supply of over-the-counter medications such as paracetamol, a thermometer as well as alcohol hand rub and a small supply of face masks in case that you become unwell.

- **Hospital or diabetes clinic appointments:** If you have any scheduled appointment with your medical team, they will contact you by telephone before the appointment and advise you on whether you should attend or whether the appointment will be postponed.

- **Helplines:** The diabetes nurses are available to advise you on 2545 5116/7/8/9 (Diabetes Education Unit, Mater Dei Hospital)

- **What to do if you feel unwell:** If at any time you feel very unwell, phone **112** for emergency care. If you experience any symptoms which may be linked to the coronavirus phone the public health helpline on 111

References:

1. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), US. Coronavirus Diseases 2019 (COVID-19): How to Prepare. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>.
2. World Health Organisation "Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations during the Covid-19 outbreak" <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>
3. European Centre for Disease Control <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/information-covid-19-specific-groups-elderly-patients-chronic-diseases-people>