Guidance for people at higher risk

If you are at higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19, you can still do many of the same things you did before the pandemic.

4 June 2021
1. What does it mean to be at higher risk?

Most people who become infected with novel coronavirus will have a mild and short course of illness, with the most common symptoms being fever, dry cough and tiredness from which they recover without treatment. Especially younger people may be infected with novel coronavirus without having symptoms.

Some people are at higher risk of becoming more severely ill if infected with novel coronavirus. These are people with certain conditions and illnesses. The degree of higher risk can vary greatly from person to person, depending both on the illness or condition, and other factors. For example, it is well documented that age determines how ill you may become from COVID-19.

However, most get well again, also persons who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Age determines how ill you may become from COVID-19

The risk of becoming severely ill is generally small for people under 50, even if you have a chronic or severe illness.

If you are under 50 and have a chronic or severe illness, it is important that you do not compare yourself to elderly people who have the same or similar illness. You should instead compare your own risk of becoming severely ill with that of healthy people of your age.

The vast majority of people under 50 with a chronic or severe illness have only a very small increased risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19, because age is on their side. Therefore it does not make sense to compare with those older or younger, as the risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 increases with age. The older you are, the greater the risk of severe illness.

If you are under 50 and have a well-managed chronic illness or condition, you can begin to start taking part in the reopening of society. You can actually do a lot of the things you did before the pandemic, such as seeing family and friends, shopping at the supermarket, going to work, taking part in leisure activities, etc. These things are important and necessary to have a good everyday life and good mental health.

As with everyone else, we recommend that you continue to follow our general guidance on how to prevent the spread of infection.
2. Who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19?

Some people are already able to assess for themselves whether their illness or condition puts them at a higher risk. If you have an illness and are not sure whether you are at higher risk, you should contact your own doctor, or the doctor responsible for your treatment to find out.

You can see who is at higher risk in the box below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People who are at higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• People aged 80 or above: Those above 80 are at higher risk, regardless of whether they have a chronic illness or condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People aged 65-79: Many healthy individuals in this age group are not at higher risk, but, for example, those with a chronic disease, or reduced mental or physical health, may be at higher risk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• People aged under 65: Although very few people are at higher risk, people in this age group are thought to be at higher risk if they have certain chronic diseases or chronic diseases that are difficult to control, are overweight with a BMI of 35 or above, and/or have a weakened immune system. For the majority of younger people in this group, the increased risk is lower, as age is an important factor in the risk of severe illness. This also means that younger people with an illness or condition should not compare themselves to older people who have the same or similar illness. They should instead compare themselves to healthy people of the same age.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Certain children and young people with chronic illnesses: Illnesses and conditions that result in higher risk in adults cannot be compared directly to children. Children and young people who may have an increased risk are typically children who before the COVID-19 pandemic were already subject to special precautions, for example special circumstances for attending school/daycare. These children have illnesses or conditions that are typically monitored in special outpatient clinics. Even severely ill children will typically have a mild course of illness from COVID-19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Residents in nursing homes: Residents in nursing homes are at higher risk as they are often elderly and have chronic diseases, poor functional ability and fragile health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pregnant women: Pregnant women are considered to be at higher risk, in order to protect both the pregnant woman and her unborn child.</td>
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If you are unsure whether you are at higher risk, please talk to your doctor.

In addition to people at higher risk, some people may be particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. due to an increased risk of infection. This applies for example to those without a fixed address. These individuals often have fragile health or chronic illnesses, and there may be barriers to their access to healthcare.
3. Guidance for people at higher risk

If you are at higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19, you can still do many of the same things you did before the pandemic. For example, you can go to work, take part in leisure activities, look after your grandchildren, etc.

If, before the COVID-19 pandemic, you already took special precautions in your everyday life to avoid becoming infected with other diseases (for example due to a weakened immune system), you should continue to do so.

Guidance for people at higher risk

1. You must in particular follow the Danish Health Authority’s six general recommendations and ask others to be considerate.
2. Wear a face mask. Face masks are required in many situations, but it is also good advice to use face masks in other situations where it isn’t possible to keep a distance of 2 metres.
3. Consider whether changes should be made at your workplace.

*If you are fully vaccinated, you don’t generally need to follow special precautions as a person at higher risk, and can do the same things as other vaccinated people – read more on page 9.*

The Danish Health Authority’s six general recommendations

People at higher risk and their relatives are recommended to pay particular attention in following the Danish Health Authority’s six recommendations for how to prevent infection.

1. Keep your distance. Avoid handshakes, hugs and kisses on the cheek.
   - Keep a distance of at least 2 metres from others wherever possible. Ask others to be considerate by keeping a distance. The Danish Health Authority has designed a badge that can signal to others that they must show consideration by keeping their distance. The badge is available from pharmacies or it can be ordered through a number of patient associations and organisations.
   - Avoid staying in places where there are many people, for example on trains, buses or the metro during rush hour, or in shops at times when there are many people.
   - Be especially careful about keeping your distance from people who have possible COVID-19 symptoms or who you know are at risk of being infected.
   - Talk to hosts and organisers of social events and leisure activities that you would like to participate in, so that they can be held in a way that reduces the risk of infection and makes you feel safe.

2. If you have symptoms, self-isolate and take a PCR test.
   Self-isolation means:
   - That you should stay at home and not meet with people you do not live with.
   - That you must avoid close contact with other people you live with.
   - That you need to pay extra attention to hygiene and cleaning.
Remember that relatives of people at higher risk who have tested positive for novel coronavirus or who are close contacts of an infected person may be granted a voluntary out-of-home stay in a self-isolation facility by the authorities in their municipality.

3. Open windows and doors and ventilate your home regularly. Avoid too many people coming together inside.
   - Open windows and doors throughout your home for ventilation. Ventilate 4 to 5 times every day for 5 to 10 minutes.
   - If you have visitors inside your home, ventilate often – for example before and after visits.
   - Meet as few people as possible indoors, and try to keep it short.

4. Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or a paper tissue – not into your hands. If you accidentally cough into your hands, wash or disinfect them afterwards.

5. Wash your hands often or use hand sanitiser.
   - You need to pay close attention to hand hygiene when you have touched contact points that many people touch in public areas. These can be door handles in shops, buttons in lifts, card terminals, ATMs, handles on buses, armrests in restaurants, café chairs, etc.
   - Always wash your hands when you come home.
   - Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes if your hands are not clean. Virus typically spreads from your hands to the mucous membranes of your nose, mouth and eyes, but it cannot be transmitted through your skin.

6. Make sure to clean thoroughly – especially surfaces that many people touch.
   - Clean your home thoroughly, especially contact points such as light switches, door handles, buttons on coffee machines, etc. Clean as usual with ordinary detergents, but do it often and be extra thorough.
   - Change and wash your clothes when you come home if you have been in contact with many people. Wash your clothes according to the washing instructions.

**Use of face masks**

For people at higher risk, it is recommended that you keep a distance of at least 2 metres. However, it is not always be possible to keep a distance of 2 metres in public areas, during leisure activities and at work without restricting people’s day-to-day and social life. In these situations, face masks may be an additional measure for preventing infection. This also applies in situations where your relatives need to be in particularly close contact with you, for example if you need nursing and care.

Always have a face mask with you when you are in public areas, so that you can put it on if necessary. As a person at higher risk, you should always use a type I factory-made CE-labelled disposable face mask, as they have a proven high filtration rate. If you cannot use a face mask, you can use a face shield or visor. You should be aware that a face shield does not provide the same protection as a face mask.

Read more about the use of face masks and visors at the Danish Health Authority's website.
**Specific measures at the workplace**

Most people at higher risk can go to work as usual if the Danish Health Authority’s guidance on how to prevent infection can be followed.

Therefore, as a general rule, you do not need to be transferred to another function or work from home, even if you have contact with many people on a day-to-day basis. However, it is important that you talk to your employer about whether some changes should be made in relation to your work tasks or working conditions, so that infection is prevented as much as possible, and you can feel safe when you go to work.

**Guidance for your employer**

- Make sure that it is possible for the employee to keep a distance of 2 metres from colleagues, clients, customers and other people, or that barriers are put up, for example a plastic or glass screen at a payment counter, or that it is possible to use face masks.
- Ensure that meetings are held with due consideration for people at higher risk, including by keeping a distance of at least 2 metres, keeping meetings as short as possible and with the possibility of participation via video.
- Ensure easy access to hand washing facilities (with liquid soap), hand sanitiser and disposable towels.
- Make sure that all employees are informed that they need to maintain good hand hygiene, including washing their hands when they arrive and before they go home, and possibly several times during the day depending on the activity.
- Ensure attention to daily and regular cleaning and disinfection of surfaces for things such as tables and chairs, as well as contact points, e.g. toilets, door handles, switches, coffee machines, etc.
- Make sure that the employees can use their own tools and devices that are not shared with others (for example telephone, keyboard), and that they have the possibility of cleaning them frequently.
- Make sure that all employees have been instructed to go home and stay at home if they develop symptoms that could give rise to suspicion of COVID-19 and that the employees know about the symptoms.

Talk to your employer if you find it difficult to follow the above recommendations.

Your employer is responsible for ensuring that the working environment at your workplace is generally safe, including that you and your colleagues are informed about possible sources of infection, for example contact points, and that it is possible to follow the Danish Health Authority’s guidance on how to prevent infection. Your employer must also make sure that you and your colleagues know the symptoms of COVID-19 and that you must stay at home and self-isolate if you develop symptoms of COVID-19.

You must discuss and agree to the specific measures with your employer. At some workplaces, there may be limited possibilities for transferring you to another function, but this must not be an obstacle if you need it. Any limited possibilities for transferring the employee to another task or function must be resolved locally, and must not be an obstacle to this.

If necessary, you can contact your treating doctor at the hospital or your own doctor for a specific assessment of your risk at the workplace. If you have doubts about workplace conditions and your rights etc., you can get advice from trade unions and similar organisations if necessary.
Guidance for people at higher risk who work in certain functions

- If you are employed in the healthcare sector or the social services and elderly care sector, you must not perform tasks or functions in your work where you participate in nursing, care or treatment of or have close contact with persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

- If you are pregnant and employed in the healthcare sector, the social services and elderly care sector or in daycare facilities for 0-6-year-olds, and if you have work functions with close contact with patients, citizens or children, you should be transferred to other work tasks where you do not have close contact with others from full 28 pregnancy weeks (28+0) and for the rest of your pregnancy. If reassignment or working from home is not possible, you should take a leave of absence (if you are fully vaccinated, other recommendations apply – read more on page 9).

What if I get ill?

You can read more about COVID-19 symptoms and what to do if you become ill in the Danish Health Authority’s information material What to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19 and What to do if you test positive for novel coronavirus.

If you become ill with COVID-19, and need a medical assessment, contact your doctor. Outside normal opening hours, you must call the out-of-hours medical service or the medical helpline in your region. Remember that you can always call your doctor if you are worried, also about other illnesses than COVID-19.
If you are fully vaccinated

You are fully vaccinated 14 days after your second injection, whichever vaccine you have received. The vaccines provide additional protection and reduce the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Therefore, as a person at higher risk, you do not need to take special precautions.

The added protection that vaccinations gives you means that:

- You can behave like other fully vaccinated people and you do not need to take any special precautions, for example wear a face mask at private gatherings.
- You can participate in activities with other people, for example leisure activities.
- You can use public transport and shop at any time of day, i.e. not just during non-peak hours.
- You can basically go to work as usual, and without having to be reassigned to other tasks. However, you should still not participate in the care or treatment of suspected or confirmed COVID-19-cases, for example in an A&E department or on a COVID-19 ward.
- Relatives of someone at higher risk do not need to be reassigned to other tasks once the person at higher risk – or the relative – has been fully vaccinated.
- As a rule, you should not be reassigned and/or sent home from week 28 of a pregnancy (28+0) if fully vaccinated and pregnant. However, based on a precautionary principle, if you are pregnant, you should not perform treatment or care for patients in A&E, on a COVID-19 ward or similar; the same applies to other fully vaccinated people at higher risk.

Read more in the pamphlet *For those who are fully vaccinated.*
4. Are you a relative of someone at higher risk?

If you are a relative of a person at a higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19, it is natural that you may be worried about infecting them by taking the virus home.

Guidance if you live with someone at higher risk

- Pay special attention to following the Danish Health Authority’s general recommendations for how to prevent infection. Also help your relatives and other people you live with, including children, to remember the recommendations.
- Keep an extra close eye on symptoms that could be COVID-19. Self-isolate immediately if you experience symptoms. This also applies if you have mild symptoms or if you are a close contact of someone infected with novel coronavirus. If you have been infected with novel coronavirus or are a close contact of an infected person, and live with a person who is at higher risk, you may be granted an out-of-home stay at a suitable facility. Please contact your municipality to learn more.

Precautions if you live with someone at higher risk

Even if you live together with someone who is at higher risk, you may participate in social contexts, go to work, attend school or kindergarten etc. like you usually do.
If you are employed in the healthcare sector or the social services and elderly care sector and live with someone at higher risk, you must not participate in planned nursing, care or treatment or have close contact with persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, and you should be transferred to another task or function. This does not apply, however, if you or your relative who is at higher risk are fully vaccinated.

Use a face mask if you are with someone who is at higher risk

As a general rule, you should always keep a distance of 2 metres as much as possible when you are visiting someone at higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 who is not fully vaccinated if you do not live with them or otherwise have regular close contact with. If this is not possible, for example because there is need for nursing or care, consider wearing a face mask to protect the person. Remember that you should use a factory-made type I CE-marked face mask. You should also show consideration for the wishes of the person at higher risk in relation to whether others should wear face masks.

If you are fully vaccinated

If, as a relative, you have been vaccinated against COVID-19, it is still important that you comply with the general recommendations for how to prevent infection. However if your relative who is at higher risk is also fully vaccinated, you can be together without keeping your distance or wearing a face mask.
Remember to get the best out of life

It is important to remember to get the best out of life while also taking care not to become infected with novel coronavirus. If you or your relative is at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and you are also in the last part of your life, it is important to get the best out of the time you have left. Here, the need for quality of life may be more important than the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19. Consider following only the advice that does not go beyond the personal contact between you and your relatives.

5. Want to know more?

If you have any questions about your illness or need a specific assessment of your own situation, please contact your own doctor or the doctor responsible for your treatment.

Many patient organisations also have information and advice on COVID-19.

If you are a person at higher risk, you also have the possibility of being vaccinated against influenza and pneumococci.

The Danish Health Authority’s information material

Please go to our website to see a list of all current publications in English - such as pamphlets, posters and films.