

# COVID-19 Advice for people with SCI: #2: If you think you have it!

## *What are the symptoms of COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)?*

These symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- A cough
- Shortness of breath
- A high temperature

## *What should I do if I'm worried I might have contracted COVID-19?*

If you are worried about symptoms, call the free dedicated health line number for COVID-19 advice 0800 358 5453. Do **NOT** go directly to your GP (most GP's are requesting you call them in advance) or other healthcare environment such as your nearest hospital or spinal unit unless specifically told to do so by Healthline. They may be able to arrange getting you tested.

The latest Ministry of Health information about COVID-19 can be found at:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

## *How is Coronavirus treated?*

Currently, there is no specific vaccine or treatment. The best way to recover from it is to:

- Get plenty of rest
- Keep hydrated
- Take simple remedies such as paracetamol to help with symptoms such as a high temperature

## *Respiratory infection*

Tetraplegia and high-level paraplegia results in changes in breathing due to paralysed muscles of respiration and abdominal muscles. It can also mean that you have a weakened cough reflex. If you develop a respiratory infection the following advice may be beneficial:

- If you are breathless avoid sitting upright. Sitting up at an angle of less than 45 degrees can make breathing easier.
- If increased secretions develop, additional support may be required to help clear your airway. For example, assisted cough performed by your carers, pressing on your

abdomen or sitting forward can increase the force at which you cough. If you have a tracheostomy and ventilation, increased frequency of bagging and suction may be required.

- Regular change of position encourages drainage of secretions.
- Remember that constipation can distend your abdomen and make breathing more difficult, so continue with your bowel care routine.
- Ensure that you and your carers follow the advice from the MoH website regarding hand washing with soap and water often, for a minimum of 20 seconds. Particularly prior to any interventions around the face, nose, mouth and eyes. This should always be done anyway!
- Clean frequently touched surfaces around the home with anti-bacterial cleanser.
- Be vigilant with the disposing of tissues.
- Your carers may need to wear a mask to protect themselves from infection.

You may need to get advice from a physiotherapist

### *Controlling body temperature and managing fever*

People with a tetraplegia injury who get fever are at a higher risk of heat exhaustion if cooling methods are not commenced. Signs of heat exhaustion include headache, confusion, slurred speech, increased heart rate and uncontrollable shivers (rigors).

To prevent this occurring if you have a fever consider employing the following actions:

- Reduce environmental temperature by turning down heating
- Remove clothing and use modesty sheet only \* Use an oscillating/turning fan. Do not have the fan continually blowing at you.
- Have frequent cold drinks .
- Place a cold damp flannel around the back of your neck and in your armpits.
- If appropriate use paracetamol and Ibuprofen to reduce fever.
- Monitor temperature closely and cease cooling interventions as soon as your temperature returns to normal limits (typically 36.5–37.5 °C or 97.7–99.5 °F) to prevent hypothermia.

If **temperature does not return** to normal consider calling the COVID-19 Healthline free on 0800 358 5453 again for further advice, do not go directly to your GP.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Fact Sheet – Shepard Centre, Atlanta, Georgia, USA  
Spinal Injuries Assn briefing on SCI & Coronavirus – SIA, Milton Keynes, UK  
Spinal Injuries Assn advice for SCI persons – SIA, Milton Keynes, UK

