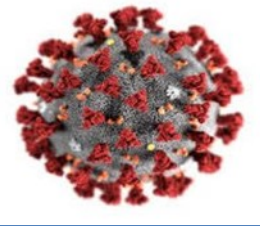




# Issue Brief:

## Risk group for COVID-19 Pandemic



**Prepared by:** Knowledge Translation Directorate, EPHI (11<sup>th</sup> April 2020)

**Background:** COVID-19 does not discriminate between race, color or creed and anybody is at risk of contracting the disease. Most people who catch COVID-19 likely experiences mild symptoms and are back to normal health within days. However, there are some people who are more at risk of serious illness than others.

**What is a risk group?** Being in a risk group means you are more likely than the general population to develop complications from the virus or you are "at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus".

Broadly, the following are major risk groups:

- 1) **Over-60s**, regardless of any medical conditions.
- 2) **People of any age who have an underlying health condition** - This group includes people who have:
  - Long-term respiratory or lung disease, like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
  - Long-term heart disease, like heart failure.
  - Long-term neurological conditions, kidney disease, liver disease, like hepatitis.
  - Diabetes.
  - Problems with their spleen like sickle cell anemia, or have had their spleen removed.
  - A weakened immune system, either as a result of a medical condition like HIV or AIDS, or as a result of medications like corticosteroids or chemotherapy.
  - Being severely obese.
- 3) The third group are at the highest risk of severe illness from coronavirus and are likely to take even more extreme measures to protect themselves. They are:
  - People **with complex health problems** - this group includes people who:
    - ◊ Have had an organ transplant and take medication to suppress their immune system.
    - ◊ Have cancer and are currently having active chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment.
    - ◊ Have blood or bone marrow cancer (like leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma) and are at any stage of treatment.
    - ◊ Have severe respiratory/lung conditions like cystic fibrosis or severe asthma that requires admission to hospital or treatment with corticosteroids.
    - ◊ Have severe diseases of the body systems, like severe kidney disease that is managed with regular dialysis.
  - \* Other populations that should be considered as key at-risk populations in strategies focusing on prevention and management of the disease include pregnant women, people experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities.
  - \* People who smoke could also be considered as a risk group. Being a smoker makes it likelier that someone fall into one of the main risk groups.

### When to worry if you're at risk

In short, try not to worry even if you or a loved-one fall into one or more risk groups. It's understandable that you might feel anxious, but if you closely follow official advice and keep up to date with any developments, there is no reason to panic.

### Priority Actions

1

#### Taking precautions:

While everybody, irrespective of age and health status, is advised to adopt prevention and control measures including social distancing, people in any of the risk groups are **strongly** advised to do so.

2

#### Self-isolation:

If you or someone in your household develops symptoms of COVID-19, you must all move from social distancing to **self-isolating**. However, it doesn't mean you should panic if you experience COVID-19 symptoms.

It is advisable to stay at home, the same as per the general population; however, if you begin to feel more unwell, you need to be assessed for medical review and/or hospital admission, based on your individual circumstances.

3

#### Getting medical advice:

It's essential that you don't go to your provider or health facility if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Instead, call to **8335/952** (or the relevant number for your region) and tell them that you may have coronavirus. Although you shouldn't panic or leave the house, it is important that you get the right advice if you're in a risk group and you are unwell with COVID-19 symptoms.

4

#### Medication and medical appointments:

Being in a risk group may also mean you have scheduled doctors' or hospital appointments. Because everybody is encouraged to follow social distancing measures, it's likely any regular, non-urgent medical appointments should be postponed or cancelled.

Although this might be frustrating, remember that these measures are being implemented to keep you and other people safe.

References used in this issue brief are found in the rapid evidence synthesis on: "*Rapid Evidence Synthesis on COVID-19 Pandemic to inform the Ethiopian Ministry of Health*"

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