

COVID-19 & Disability

People with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) have a reduced immune system and/or respiratory issues. All this makes them more susceptible to Covid-19 which affects the respiratory functions.

Tetraplegia (Loss of motor and/or sensory function in the cervical segments of the spinal cord resulting in impaired function in hands, arms, trunk, legs and pelvic organs) and Paraplegia (Loss of motor and/or sensory function in the thoracic, lumbar or sacral segments, the trunk, legs and pelvic organs may be involved) results in changes in breathing due to paralysed muscles of respiration and abdominal muscles. There can be weakened cough reflex.

Following steps may be beneficial:

Sitting upright lowers the diaphragm due to paralysis of the supporting abdominal muscles. It increases the effort required to breathe. If feeling breathless, avoid sitting upright. Sitting up at an angle of less than 45 degrees can make breathing easier.

If secretions increase, support may be required to help clear the airway. For example, assisted cough performed by the carers, pressing on your abdomen or sitting forward can increase the force at which you

How soon is the spread of Corona Virus?

The COVID-19 virus spreads rapidly. It is transmitted from person to person by droplets from your respiratory system through coughing and saliva, through mucous membranes such as touching your eye, nostril, mouth, genitals or rectum and by touching contaminated objects. The virus can live for hours on things that someone has touched with COVID-19 contaminated fluids or hands. When you connect with the contaminated droplet and touch a mucous membrane entry into your body occurs.

How does COVID-19 affect the body?

The lungs are elastic and they inflate and deflate. COVID-19 affects the lungs by making them fibrous or less able to stretch.

cough. If you have a tracheostomy (tube in windpipe) and ventilation, increased frequency of bagging and suction may be required.

Regular change of position encourages drainage of secretions.

Constipation can distend abdomen and make breathing more difficult, so take care of bowel routine.

Spinal cord injury can affect body's ability to regulate body temperature.

Those who have high fever are at a high risk of heat exhaustion if cooling methods like (monitoring temperature, turning on fans, using damp cloth on forehead etc) are not used. Signs of heat exhaustion include headache, confusion, slurred speech, increased heart rate and uncontrollable shivers

Carers must follow the advice washing with soap and water often, for a minimum of 20 seconds. They may need to wear a mask to protect themselves from infection.

SCI people and their families, friends and healthcare professionals should rigorously follow the advice or precautions to prevent the infection. Care givers need to be particularly observant.

Ensure you have sufficient backup in case your regular carer or personal assistant cannot work.



What is the best way to prevent infection?

Wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds or use an alcohol based sanitizer.

Cover your or sneeze with a tissue and dispose the tissue immediately.

Clean and disinfect touched objects frequently.

Avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth with unwashed hands.