



CDC Report Confirms Elevated COVID-19 Risk Among People With Preexisting Conditions

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Since the outbreak of COVID-19, health officials have advised that people with underlying health conditions are at greater risk for developing severe cases of the disease. A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers the first U.S. data to indicate the significance of this increased risk.

Consistent with findings in [China](#) and [Italy](#), the preliminary data presented in the [CDC report](#) suggests that people with preexisting conditions have a higher chance of being hospitalized with COVID-19 and even dying of complications from the disease.

The CDC reviewed data from 7,162 COVID-19 patients in the U.S. between February 12 and March 31. Among those patients, 2,692 (37.6 percent) had one or more underlying health condition or risk factors.

The report found that 78 percent of patients admitted to an intensive-care unit had at least one known preexisting condition. Of those hospitalized who didn't require an ICU admission, 71 percent reported at least one underlying condition. And 94 percent of those who died of COVID-19-related illness had at least one known underlying condition.

While COVID-19 is typically more severe among older people, the new data show that people of any age with preexisting medical conditions are at an increased risk of getting very sick. Among the most common underlying conditions were diabetes (10.9 percent); chronic lung disease, including asthma, COPD, and emphysema (9.2 percent); and cardiovascular disease (9 percent).

“The virus attacks the lungs and heart, so people with lung disease or heart disease or conditions that lead to heart disease (such as hypertension and diabetes) are at heightened risk,” explains [Neal Barnard, MD](#), president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

Diabetes, in particular, poses [special complications](#) due to the fact that the disease compromises the immune system, making it harder for patients to fight viruses. Additionally, COVID-19 may thrive in an environment of elevated glucose.

Other conditions and risk factors included chronic renal disease; chronic liver disease; immunocompromised condition; neurologic disorder, neurodevelopmental or intellectual disability; pregnancy; and current and former smoking status.

The CDC acknowledges some limitations of this data set, noting that because of the lack of widespread COVID-19 testing, the analysis is likely biased toward more severe cases.

In addition to protective measures such as thorough handwashing, disinfecting high-touch surfaces, and staying at home, the CDC recommends that people who have underlying conditions maintain at least a 30-day supply of medication and a two-week supply of food and other necessities; and that they contact their health care provider immediately if they develop any symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Visit the [CDC website](#) for more information.