



# FACT SHEET: INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY TO ACCESS HEALTH CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This fact sheet is for families of a person with intellectual or developmental disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Are people with intellectual or developmental disability at greater risk of COVID-19?

Some people with intellectual or developmental disability may:

- be at greater risk of serious illness due to COVID-19 if they have [certain medical conditions and co-morbidities](#)
- have difficulty understanding and adhering to social distancing, handwashing and other risk reduction strategies. This may increase their risk of acquiring COVID-19
- not show or be able to communicate early COVID-19 symptoms because of their disability or medical treatments. For example, cough and fever may not present as early signs of COVID-19, or the person may have difficulty communicating symptoms such as a sore throat.

### What role can families play?

Families are essential to the health and wellbeing of many people with intellectual or developmental disability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, families should:

- assist their family member to use preventative measures, such as physical distancing and good hygiene
- assist their family member to access testing and treatment if any symptoms develop
- support their family member to understand and make decisions based on advice from the Australian Government and state and territory governments

- support their family member to access their usual health care, including their GP and any specialists
- support their family member to maintain physical and mental health and wellbeing (e.g. through exercise, activities and reducing loneliness).

## What actions should families and carers take?

Families should ensure that they have the resources they need to support their family member during the pandemic.

- Provide information about COVID-19 to their family member with disability in a way that is accessible and that the person can understand
- Ensure that their family member's health care plans are up to date and available in their medical records. This should include:
  - information about their communication needs
  - names and contact details of those involved in their health care. This should include primary care providers, specialists and those involved in health care decisions (including details of next of kin)
  - a complete medical history. This includes information about their disability, pre-existing health issues (especially respiratory and heart conditions) and current medications
  - a current [advanced care directive or plan](#) if appropriate
  - their mental health and/or Positive Behaviour Support plan, if they have one
- Assist the family member to keep their vaccinations for influenza and pneumonia up to date
- Have an alternative support plan in case you or other carers develop COVID-19 symptoms and are unable to provide your usual support
- Ensure you are aware of the [latest government advice](#) about COVID-19
- Familiarise yourself with infection control procedures and comply with measures to lower risks of acquiring and transmitting COVID-19. [COVID-19 infection control training](#) is available on the Australian Government Department of Health's website
- Ensure you know when and how to access help for everyday health issues, as well as COVID-19 symptoms.

## How can families support access to health care?

- Do not postpone health care. Continue treatments for chronic health conditions and seek treatment as usual for other health concerns. In the event of an emergency, follow usual protocols and seek emergency medical care
- Make sure your family member's health care plan is available to health care providers. Upload details to My Health Record where possible
- Talk to your family member's health care providers about how and when they are offering services (e.g. home visits, telehealth or face to face consultations)

- Monitor your family member's mental wellbeing and behaviour for impacts of the pandemic
- Support your adult family member to make their own medical decisions to the greatest extent possible. If they are unable to consent, follow substitute consent laws.

## What if a family member or the person with disability develops symptoms of COVID-19?

If you think your family member or another person in your family may have COVID-19:

- help them to call their doctor or the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 or call on their behalf
- seek advice on testing, treatment and how to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to other people
- consider whether alternative supports need to be mobilised if the person suspected of having COVID-19 usually provides support to your family member.

## Where can I get more information?

For the latest health advice, information and resources on the COVID-19 pandemic, go to [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au). For additional information specific to people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic, go to <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-disability>.

The [Disability Information Helpline](http://www.health.gov.au) on 1800 643 787 can provide information and assistance about COVID-19. The Helpline is available Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm (AEST) and Saturday to Sunday 9am to 7pm (AEST). It is not available on national public holidays.

An [Intellectual and Developmental Disability Health Working Group](#) convened by 3DN, UNSW Sydney prepared this fact sheet.