Managing COVID-19 and Obesity

Are Certain Individuals at Higher Risk of COVID-19?

Patients with metabolic disorders and obesity are at an increased risk for severe COVID-19 because their bodies have a harder time fighting off the virus. Additionally, these patients may experience heart, lung, and other health problems that make it more difficult to recover from COVID-19.

Obesity makes it more likely for people to have serious breathing problems and respiratory failure if they catch COVID-19. This means they may need to go to the hospital, stay in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and have more complications such as needing a ventilator, developing blood clots, or having longer hospital stays. This can lead to long-term complications.

What Can You Do to Prevent COVID-19?

To prevent COVID-19 infection, all individuals, including those managing obesity, can take general precautions, such as:

- **Practicing good hand hygiene** by frequently washing with soap and water or cleansing with a sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol
- **Wearing a mask** when it is difficult to maintain physical distancing
- **Supporting a healthy immune system** through diet, sleep, stress management, and regular physical activity
- **Talking with a healthcare provider**

Vaccines

It is recommended that everyone aged six months and older receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals with obesity and other metabolic conditions are eligible for an additional booster dose of the updated vaccine.

> People with obesity and other metabolic disorders **should still receive COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters**, despite limited data suggesting reduced effectiveness.

Three primary types of vaccines are currently available, all proven effective in reducing the risk of infection and severity of illness. Consult your healthcare provider to determine the right vaccine for you.

COVID-19 Tests

Two testing options are available to determine current or recent COVID-19 infection:

- **PCR tests** require a visit to a healthcare provider, as your sample will be sent to a laboratory for testing. These tests are considered the gold standard for their accuracy and are recommended for those who do not have symptoms following exposure or to confirm the results of antigen tests.
- **Antigen (or rapid) tests** are readily accessible and available for home use, offering rapid results. They are less accurate in the early days of infection or when you do not have symptoms but are a good option if you have symptoms and have been exposed to the virus.

If you test positive for COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider for guidance on next steps and treatment options.

How is COVID-19 Treated?

Early treatment of COVID-19 is especially important for patients managing obesity or other metabolic conditions to:

- Make the illness less severe
- Avoid going to the hospital
- Lower the chances of long-term health problems
- Prevent spreading the virus to others

If you have obesity and test positive for COVID-19, continue taking your regular medications unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise.

Treatment Options

There are approved treatments for severe COVID-19, especially for those at higher risk, like adults over age 50 or people with certain medical conditions, including obesity. Your healthcare provider can tell you if these treatments are right for you.

Obesity Management

After recovering from COVID-19, it is essential to continue managing obesity by:

- **Visiting your healthcare provider regularly**
- **Taking care of other health problems linked to obesity**
- **Not delaying obesity treatment, including counseling, medications, or surgery**

ADRIAN BANNING
DHSC, PA-C
Associate Professor, Delaware Valley University PA Program
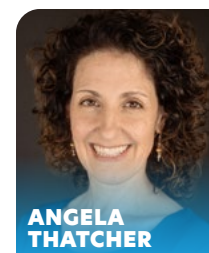
ANGELA THATCHER
PA-C
Owner of Lifelong Health & Wellness

SAMPATH WIJESINGHE
DHSC, AAHIVS, PA-C
Adventist Health Central Valley Network and Clinical Assistant Professor, Stanford School of Medicine PA

AAPA