

# What if I Get Seriously Ill with COVID-19?

## Life-Support Treatments and Complications

This document goes with the “*Be Prepared in the Time of COVID-19*” guide, and provides additional information about life-support treatments related to COVID-19. The information is meant to help you think about how you would want to be cared for if you became seriously ill with COVID-19.

It is important to know that most people will not need these treatments if they become sick with COVID-19, but planning ahead and being informed about possible treatments is important.

**Please speak with your doctor/healthcare provider if you have specific wishes about life-support treatments you would or would not want.** They may write you a medical order called a **Goals of Care Designation** and give you the completed form so that your wishes are known in an emergency.

Visit [www.conversationsmatter.ca](http://www.conversationsmatter.ca) for more information (click on ‘Patients and Families’ and then ‘Resources’).



### What we know about people who get sick with COVID-19

- Most people with COVID-19 recover on their own while self-isolating at home
- A small number of people become sick enough to need care in a hospital. A few of them become seriously ill and may need to be admitted to hospital intensive care (ICU)
- Older adults and people with existing medical conditions are more likely to become seriously ill with COVID-19 and have a higher risk of dying

***There is currently no cure for COVID-19.***

***The goal of treatment is to give your body the chance to fight the virus.***



### How does admission to an ICU help someone seriously ill with COVID-19?

Admission to ICU allows for care and treatments that are not available elsewhere in a hospital, including:

- Constant monitoring with machines and specialized healthcare providers
- A breathing tube connected to a breathing machine (a ventilator)
- A period of sedation (medically-induced coma) if needed



### Possible complications following discharge from ICU

- Memory problems, concentrations problems, emotional changes
- Trouble performing simple tasks such as cooking, cleaning, making phone calls
- Permanent lung damage from being on a ventilator for a long period of time
- Infections



### Why people seriously ill with COVID-19 may be treated with a ventilator

- People seriously ill with COVID-19 find it difficult to breathe on their own
- A ventilator pushes air through a tube directly into a person's lungs
- The ventilator may keep them alive long enough for their body to fight the disease

### How well does ventilation work?

- Many people seriously ill with COVID-19 who are put on a ventilator do not survive
- Those who survive may never return to their previous health
- The longer people are on a ventilator the more likely they are to have a poor outcome or die



### What is cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)?

**CPR** is an emergency procedure used if you stop breathing or your heart stops beating. It can include:

- Pressing forcefully on your chest and possibly breathing into your mouth
- Electrical shock and drugs to try and start your heart

### How well does cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) work?

- Very few people of all ages survive CPR in hospital
- CPR can cause injuries, such as broken ribs or bruised lungs
- People who survive CPR often need ICU care and a ventilator afterwards
- About half of the people who survive CPR are left with brain damage and ongoing serious health issues



### Who is most likely to be helped by a ventilator or CPR?

- People who were mostly healthy before becoming seriously ill with COVID-19
- Those who only need a ventilator for a short time (days or a week or two)

### Who is less likely to be helped by a ventilator or CPR?

- Those who have heart, lung, liver, or kidney problems
- Those who have a terminal illness, such as advanced cancer or advanced dementia
- Those who are older or very frail

**Talk with your doctor or healthcare provider about your own health, COVID-19, and how these treatments and their risks might impact you.**

Disclaimer: This information is based on clinical studies and the experience of healthcare providers, it does not replace professional medical advice.



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