

ANZMES Release on Covid 19 March 2020



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With the news surrounding Covid19, many with ME/CFS may feel vulnerable. Please follow

the suggestions that are now being given:

Avoid large crowds, keep a healthy distance from others, avoiding close contact. Wash hands well with soap and water, dry well, and avoid touching your face.

If you cough or sneeze, do so into the crook of your elbow or a tissue rather than into the air. If you can't wash properly or have chemical sensitivities, perhaps wear gloves or take alternative measures. If you are working, consider working remotely, if possible.

Some of you are already in a form of self-isolation, being housebound or bedbound. If you are feeling worried or anxious,

don't hesitate to talk to others. Reach out when you need to talk.

Prevention - how to protect yourself and others

To help take some of the stress off the ME/CFS community, we have compiled an easy-read

resource as a "one-stop shop," with the latest information, advisories and resources from

government and health authorities.

Health Recommendations

● If you have a **fever or respiratory symptoms, seek medical help promptly**. Call your doctor or clinic before making an appointment, tell them about your symptoms and follow their advice.

● If you have **severe breathing difficulty, call 111 immediately** and tell them if you have travelled recently or had contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19.

● Social distancing is critical to minimise the spread of contagion, and to keep the demand on health services to a manageable level. This means you should keep at least 1-2 metres away from other people. (Maintain a larger distance if this is a concern for you.)

● Ask people not to visit unless it is absolutely essential and avoid touching surfaces if you are out and about.

● Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

● Wash your hands with soap more often than usual and dry well, especially if you have been out or had to touch things that other

people may have touched.

- You should soap your hands for longer than usual (at least 20 seconds or the time it takes to sing the alphabet song). You can also use alcohol-based sanitiser if soap and water are unavailable.
- If you need to cough or sneeze do this into a crooked elbow rather than your hand; dispose of any tissues promptly and safely.
- Aim to have additional medications and household supplies on hand in case you need to stay at home for an extended period of time. Think of who might be available to assist with shopping and delivering things if needed.
- If you are dependent on carers, plan backup options if you can, in case they become ill or need to care for their own family members.
- Clean any surfaces in your home that are frequently touched (these might include your phone, doorknobs and your fridge for instance).

Taking care of your wellbeing

Your emotional and mental health is important. It is normal to feel stressed or lonely when self-isolating, but there are some things you can do to feel better:

- Reach out to your usual support, like family, whānau and friends. Talk about how you feel. We also recommend sticking to a routine such as having regular mealtimes and bedtimes. Get as much fresh air and outdoor activity as possible, without inducing a relapse. Remember to pace yourself, just as you normally do.
- If you feel you are not coping, it is important to talk to a health professional. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental

wellbeing, you can call or text 1737 – free, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – to talk with a trained counsellor.

If you, or your family member, become sick

Contact **Healthline** for free on [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453), or your GP if you begin to feel sick.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

Call **Healthline 24/7** on [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453) if you need to speak to someone or need more information.

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.

Call **Healthline** on [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453) if you have any symptoms and have been to countries or territories of concern or have been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19.

We will keep you posted if more specific ME/CFS advice becomes available. You aren't alone in this; we are all in this together. As information is reaching us quite quickly now, some of the information in these links may be repetitive:

Dr Shepherd from the **UK ME Association** has put out a statement and this link will be

updated.

<https://www.meassociation.org.uk/2020/03/me-association-guidance-coronavirus-covid-19-update-09-march-2020/>

Dr Nigel Speight (with the help of Dr Willy Weir) has put together

the following advice for people with Severe ME/CFS.

He notes that, "Although ME is a "chronic condition" my gut feeling is that [people with ME/CFS] are not actually at greater risk of dying from the virus itself than healthy people. The conditions which put people at extra risk would be things like severe asthma or COPD, or immuno-suppressed people (e.g. those on chemotherapy for cancer). The biggest worry therefore for ME sufferers is that catching the virus will make their ME much worse."

His advice is to be (unashamedly) very cautious, discourage visitors - if you can tolerate the isolation - and add additional Vitamin D to help fortify the immune system against the virus. He does note that people with severe ME/CFS are actually at lower risk of catching the virus because they do not go out, therefore reducing the chances of community transmission.

Jennie Spotila, patient and advocated, posted 28 February 2020:

<http://occupyme.net/2020/02/28/a-new-virus-and-me/>

Prof Nancy Klimas has put together this very good video on Covid 19 for her ME/CFS patients in the US:

<https://www.nova.edu/nim/index?fbclid=IwAR1oNP2DvSS39HbFjIzkLPxyIthUmIRpOO8VAhyLMhhU1VaSaxA1KHulrF0>

From Solve/ME CFS Initiative in the US.

<https://solvecfs.org/covid-19-and-the-me-cfs-community/>

For more specific NZ updates go to

<https://www.health.govt.nz/news-media/news-items/covid-19-media-update-17-march>