

Disabilities and Unique Health Needs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Frequently asked questions

I have a Baclofen pump that needs a refill. I have been told that some people have not been allowed to have that procedure because it is not considered essential. Is this true?

Executive Order 20-09 was issued on March 23, 2020 and rescinded on May 10, 2020. The executive order restricted elective inpatient and outpatient medical procedures in order to conserve critical health care resources. The intent of that order was never to restrict procedures such as a Baclofen pump refill, which is necessary to treat the spasticity experienced by people with multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy and other neurological diseases. We recognize that without such a procedure, a person can experience severe pain and lose the ability to carry out their daily activities. No further executive orders to scale back medical procedures are planned at this time. However, if another order were to be considered, procedures with such time sensitivity and dire consequences for delay would be excluded.

I am hard of hearing and have a hard time when others use a mask. What should I do?

Masks can make communication very hard for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, masks can help decrease the spread of COVID-19.

People may remove their masks when asked to do so by someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, if they can keep a safe social distance of 6 feet. A clear mask or plastic face shield can be worn so the face can be seen. People may also use speech-to-text apps, or write notes on paper or mobile devices.

I am unable to wear a mask. What should I do?

Wearing a mask can help slow the spread of COVID-19. However, some people cannot wear masks for medical and physical reasons. People who are unable to wear a mask may be able to wear a face shield instead.

If you cannot wear a mask or a face shield, try to stay away from places where you cannot keep at least 6 feet away from others.

- If store customers must wear masks, you may still be able to shop before the store opens or after it closes. Call the store to find out if you can do this.
- Ask family and friends to shop for you.
- Shop online and pick up your items outside at the curb, or have them delivered.

Some employers are placing workers farther apart, putting up plastic screens, and taking other steps so employees can work safely. More information about reasonable accommodations is in the [American Disabilities Act of 1990](#).

A family member is in a group home. What do I need to know?

If a family member lives in a group setting, it is important to work with the on-site care team. Ask about what measures they have in place to protect your loved one from COVID-19 and how they will still meet the needs of your loved one. Sometimes it can be hard to do both, and they may need to change some practices.

My family member is at risk and we need more personal protective equipment for their personal care staff. What should we do?

If you use services through an agency, check with agency staff for access to personal protective equipment. You may also check with medical suppliers about ordering some.

If you continue to have trouble finding the personal protective equipment you need, call the Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 Public Hotline at 1-833-431-2053.

I am worried that I will not get the care I need because of my disability. How do they decide who gets care when there is not enough to go around?Deciding how to use limited medical resources during a health crisis depends on medical, ethical, community, and resource considerations. In Minnesota, simply having a disability does not make a person less likely than others to get the care they need for COVID-19 or any other health issue. If you need a ventilator for other health issues, it will not be taken from you to extend supplies for others.

Minnesota is using COVID-19 testing and other safety measures to keep people from getting sick all at the same time. This lessens the daily demand for medical resources, so that resources can help keep up with patient needs.

I am a caregiver of someone who has a disability that makes communicating very hard. This person would need extra support if they go into the hospital. I have heard that nobody can stay with someone in the hospital who has COVID-19. Is this true?

Hospitals should let at least one support person or legal guardian go to the hospital, visit in the hospital, or stay in the hospital with someone who has a disability or who is a child. Safety methods must be followed. The Minnesota Department of Health has provided guidance to Minnesota hospitals to support the needs of patients with disabilities and pediatric patients.