



COVID-19 STRIKES THE HEART? REPORT #2750

BACKGROUND: Heart disease describes a range of conditions that affect your heart, such as blood vessel diseases (coronary artery disease); heart rhythm problems (arrhythmias); and heart defects you're born with (congenital heart defects). The term "heart disease" is often used interchangeably with the term "cardiovascular disease." Cardiovascular disease generally refers to conditions that involve narrowed or blocked blood vessels that can lead to a heart attack, chest pain, or stroke. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States, and someone dies of cardiovascular disease every 37 seconds. High blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease. About half of Americans (47%) have at least one of these three risk factors.

(Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20353118> and <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm>)

CORONAVIRUS AND THE HEART: Health experts are saying that people with heart disease have extra reasons to be alert when it comes to the coronavirus. Based on early reports, 40% of hospitalized COVID-19 patients had cardiovascular disease or cerebrovascular disease (which refers to blood flow in the brain, such as stroke). The virus could affect heart disease patients in several ways, said Orly Vardeny, associate professor of medicine at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and University of Minnesota. The virus' main target is the lungs which in turn could affect the heart, especially a diseased heart, which has to work harder to get oxygenated blood throughout the body. Someone with an underlying heart issue also might have a weakened immune system. If such a person catches a virus, it's likely to stick around and cause complications. COVID-19 has similarities to influenza, said Vardeny, who is also a volunteer for the American Heart Association. Currently, Vardeny said, "We don't think the actual risk is any higher per se. It's just that the spread is quicker. And unlike the flu, there's no vaccine."

(Source: <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2020/02/27/what-heart-patients-should-know-about-coronavirus>)

PREVENTION FOR HEART PATIENTS: Prevention is the best medicine. "To reduce the odds of catching COVID-19, follow recommendations by the CDC, the WHO, and your local, state, and federal governments," cardiologist Paul Cremer, MD, says. If you develop COVID-19 symptoms such as a cough and fever, there are some things you should and shouldn't do. Call your doctor and discuss the next step. Different locales have different recommendations about who should be tested or hospitalized. Your doctor can advise you about what to do and where to go. Don't stop taking any of your prescription medications without speaking to a doctor. Some reports have suggested that certain heart medications might make it easier for the virus to multiply. However, there's no current evidence of that happening in human patients. "We don't yet know how medications might affect the virus, but we do know it can be harmful if you stop taking the medications you use to control blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease or diabetes," Dr. Cremer says. Maintaining a heart-healthy diet and exercise habits is as important as ever. The American Heart Association recommends about 20 to 30 minutes of exercise, five to seven days a week.

(Source: <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/what-heart-patients-need-to-know-about-covid-19/>)

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