

Protecting people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic

It is vital that everyone follows basic measures to protect themselves and others from becoming ill with COVID-19. More than 100 million people with disability live in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. All service providers must ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity and without discrimination, and that they are not left behind during this challenging time.



People with disability should...

- Avoid crowded spaces and transport where possible.
- Stock enough food, medication and other essential products for at least two weeks.
- Shop online or by phone where possible and ask family, friends or caregivers for help.
- Regularly clean and disinfect assistive products such as wheelchairs, white canes, etc.
- Put a plan in place to ensure continuity of care and support.
- Identify organizations, hotlines and people you can ask for assistance, if needed.



Caregivers should...

- Tell the person you are taking care of or their family and seek medical help early if you have any COVID-19 symptoms.
- If you suspect that the person you are taking care of has COVID-19 symptoms, wear a medical mask, wash your hands thoroughly and seek medical help immediately.
- Make sure any assistive products are regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- Keep a list of public services and community organizations that can help.
- Plan ahead with the person you are taking care of to ensure continuity of care, including medication and other supplies, additional medical care, psychosocial and mental health support, and any other requirements such as repairing or replacing assistive products.



Governments should...

- Ensure all health care facilities are accessible, including testing and isolation services.
- Make all public health information accessible to people with all forms of disabilities.
- Engage people with disability and their representatives in planning the pandemic response.
- Ensure that financial compensation schemes cover people with disability, and provide flexible work arrangements for them, their families and caregivers.
- Ensure continuity of services and support in case the number of available caregivers may be reduced, including fast-track training opportunities for new workforce.
- Provide a hotline in multiple formats (e.g. telephone, email, SMS, easy language apps, etc.) for people with disability to ask questions and raise concerns.
- Ensure service providers and caregivers for people with disability have access to personal protective equipment and COVID-19 testing free of charge.



Health care workers should...

- Adopt alternative ways of providing health care such as home visits, telephone consultation and video conferencing to maintain services for people with disability.
- Deliver information and communicate in diverse formats to suit the different needs of people with different disabilities. Do not rely solely on either spoken or written information.
- Deliver sufficient support for people with disability with more complex needs.
- Make sure that health workers are aware of the potential impact of COVID-19 on the health and living conditions of people with disability.



Disability service providers should...

- Develop and implement service continuity plans in consultation with people with disability, their families and other local disability and caregiver agencies.
- If resources for continuity plans are not available, consider engaging the community and asking for additional support, particularly from people in relevant disciplines (e.g. nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy).
- Communicate frequently with people with disability and their support networks to provide targeted information about COVID-19, making sure all information is accessible.
- Train the disability care workforce in infection prevention and control.
- Continue to provide sufficient support for people with disability who have complex needs.

Actions for the community...

- Establish flexible work arrangements for people with disability and caregivers, including providing paid leave if they are at high risk of severe symptoms.
- Increase access to stores and set up special shopping hours for people with disability.
- Schools and other educational facilities should take appropriate action to ensure continuity of education for people and children with disability.
- Family, friends and neighbours should check in regularly on people with disability to provide emotional, practical and communication support.

Protecting people with disability in humanitarian and emergency settings

Most countries in the Region are directly or indirectly affected by emergencies, and COVID-19 poses additional challenges. Health care and protection service providers must make sure that people with disability are included in all emergency preparedness and response plans, and that rehabilitation services and assistive products continue to be provided during the pandemic.

For more information on supporting people with disability, see the dedicated web page of WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean:

www.emro.who.int/vip