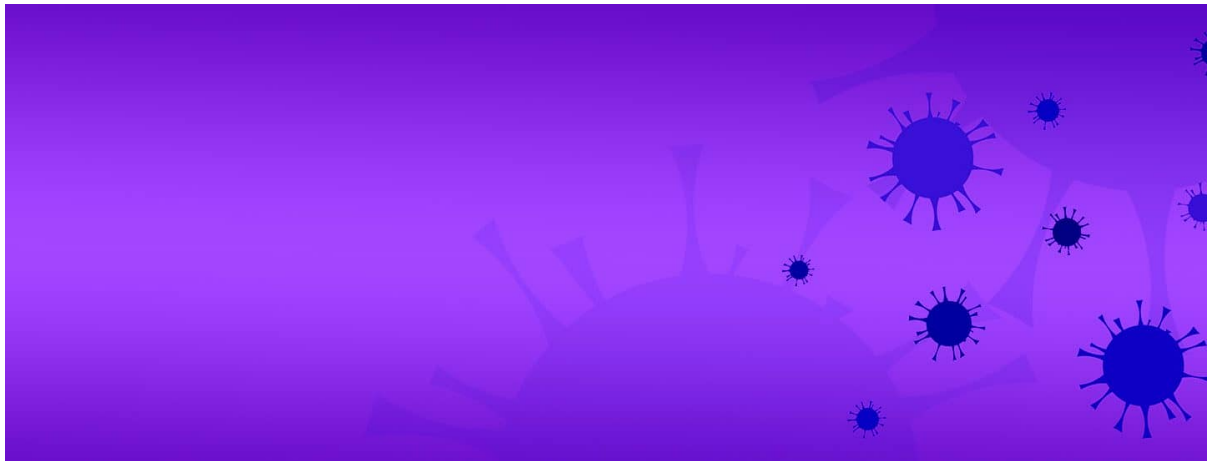


# Coronavirus and Epilepsy



Read the latest statement from the International Bureau for Epilepsy and International League Against Epilepsy on the coronavirus vaccine [here](#).

The onset of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic is having an impact on communities around the world, and the New Zealand epilepsy community is no different.

As restrictions change and the viral infection continues to spread, it is important for all people to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and others, especially those living with medical conditions. Make sure you keep up to date with the general coronavirus information available on the Ministry of Health website [here](#).

The Ministry of Health has also set up a special 'Unite Against COVID-19' website with updated information on alert levels, travel restrictions and vaccine availability. You can access the site [here](#).

If you or your loved one living with epilepsy has not yet spoken with your healthcare provider about individual risks, it is important that you do so. Each person's situation is different, and while we all must practice safe hygiene and social distancing, extra precautions may be necessary in some cases.

You can read about Epilepsy New Zealand's response to the pandemic [here](#).

## Access to medications

From Thursday March 20....

## FAQ on COVID-19 and epilepsy



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The following information has been adapted from information provided by Epilepsy New Zealand of America. The document can be accessed [here](#).

### Are people with epilepsy at higher risk of developing COVID-19?

Epilepsy is a 'family' of many different disorders that lead to seizures. For those with epilepsy and no other health problems, the available data suggests that it:

1. Does not increase the risk of getting COVID-19 AND
2. Does not increase the severity of COVID-19

Some people with epilepsy regardless of seizure control have other health conditions that put them at higher risk from COVID-19.

- They may be taking medicines to control seizures that also affect their immune system (for example, ACTH, steroids, immunotherapies). Or they may have other neurological or developmental issues that affect their immunity. People in these situations are at greater risk of developing more severe symptoms with viral illnesses.
- People with epilepsy may have other medical problems that could place them at higher risk of developing more severe symptoms with COVID-19.
  - For example, people who have problems swallowing or frequently inhale food or liquids into their lungs (aspiration) are at higher risk for pneumonia.
  - People with diabetes or underlying heart or lung problems also appear to be at higher risk for severe COVID-19.

If you have specific concerns about how COVID-19 could affect your epilepsy or other health conditions, you should contact your healthcare provider.

### Can COVID-19 increase seizures if a person gets the virus?

When a person with epilepsy gets sick with another illness, especially with a fever, they may notice a change or increase in their seizures.

- The illness is a physical and emotional stressor to the body that could make seizures more likely. The same happens if someone is sick with COVID-19.
- Other triggers may include
  - Not eating or drinking normally
  - Not being able to take medications regularly (for example, if vomiting is a problem)
  - Not being able to sleep well
- Worry and anxiety about seizures and COVID-19 may affect people



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Preliminary information from countries where outbreaks have occurred suggests that the risk of worsening seizures with COVID-19 appears to be low for most people with epilepsy.

### What should be done if seizures change or increase?

If you or a loved one develop COVID-19 and notice changes in seizures, contact your epilepsy health care provider, as well as your primary care provider.

- Call your providers first. Don't just go to their office without an appointment – this could put other people at risk for getting the virus.
- Don't go to a hospital emergency department on your own unless it is an emergency. Many times you can be treated at home.
- Treating the symptoms of the viral illness is especially important. Make sure you can eat, drink, sleep, and take medicines regularly.
- If needed, your provider may recommend an adjustment in seizure medicine or recommend an emergency medication to use during periods of increased seizures. If you already have been prescribed an emergency medication, talk to your pharmacist about an emergency supply.
- If you are worried about going to a hospital or health care appointment, ask your provider if they have phone or video visits. These are usually called telehealth visits.
  - If this is a routine visit, ask your provider if it is safe to postpone or reschedule the appointment.
- However, just like any other time, if you or a loved one have an emergency such as seizures lasting too long or more seizures than usual, seek emergency help.



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