

Increased Risk for Severe Health Complications from COVID-19 Infections: LGBTQ+ Individuals

People At Risk for Severe Illness

People at higher risk for severe illness from a COVID-19 infection (admitted to ICU, mechanical ventilation, or death) include: people age 65+, people living in nursing homes or long term care facilities, people with serious heart conditions, people who are immunocompromised, people with severe obesity and underlying medical conditions ([CDC](#)).

People Over the Age of 65

In the US, an estimated 2.4 million LGBTQ+ individuals are over the age of 65. LGBTQ+ seniors are more likely to be single and not have biological children. They are disproportionately impacted by poverty, physical and mental health conditions compared to non-LGBTQ+ seniors. ([APA](#)) LGBTQ+ seniors often rely on “chosen family” and social networks more than biological relatives. Caregivers and support systems may be less accessible during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Nursing Homes/Long-Term Care

LGBTQ+ seniors living in nursing home or long-term care facilities may not be open about their LGBTQ+ identity. So caregivers may not be aware of these individuals’ increased risks. Those who are open about their identity experience higher rates of mistreatment and abuse, including not receiving proper medical care. Individuals may have increased concerns about the care they will receive during emergency health situations, such as COVID-19. ([AARP](#); [LGBT Older Adults in Long-Term Care Facilities](#)).

Immunocompromised

LGBTQ+ individuals have higher rates of HIV and cancer than non-LGBTQ+ individuals, which increases their risk for severe illness. In particular, trans individuals have HIV rates 50% higher than the general population ([transequality.org](#)).

Other Chronic Medical Conditions

LGBTQ+ individuals have higher rates of cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses ([Lick, et al.](#)). Individuals with these chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for more severe COVID-19 illness.

COVID-19 and Smoking

While limited, [research](#) suggests that smokers are at higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19 than non-smokers. [WHO](#) indicates that smokers are at increased risk of surface to person spread (from the act of smoking), as well as severe illness due to lung disease and reduced lung capacity. LGBTQ+ adults are more likely to smoke than non-LGBTQ+ adults ([CDC](#); [smokefree.gov](#)). Consequentially, LGBTQ+ individuals are at increased risk for severe complications from COVID-19.

Increased Risk of Exposure

LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely than non-LGBTQ+ individuals to work in industries and environments that increase worker exposure to COVID-19, including restaurants, food service, and hospitals ([HRC](#)).

Learn more about COVID-19 and ways to protect yourself, loved ones, and your community: Visit [California Department of Public Health COVID-19](#)