

Recommendations for patients with epilepsy regarding to coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic

Patients with epilepsy

Epilepsy treatment is often a long-term or even lifelong matter. It requires regular use of antiepileptics in order to maintain the level of medicines in the brain at a level that is sufficient to suppress the seizure. It is therefore extremely important to follow doctor's instructions on treatment and be informed about the current serious situation caused by coronavirus in Slovakia.

Lot of people are concerned if epilepsy patients are at higher risk of getting infected by the coronavirus.

The risk of being infected with coronavirus is not higher in patients with epilepsy and suffering from epilepsy does not affect the progression of the disease.

Because of the need for chronic treatment and regular prescription, follow these recommendations:

- Make sure that you have **enough medication** and be calm
- Most doctors can prescribe medication as an **e-prescription** nowadays
- If the disease progresses calmly without complications, prefer to contact your doctor by phone and ask him to issue you an e-prescription for the medications you need: it can be done by your GP to whom you have previously delivered the information from your neurologist about your condition, if your neurologist allowed him to prescribe medicine under his code. It can be also your neurologist directly.
- **Get your medication at least a week in advance** so they can be ordered by your pharmacist if needed (lot of antiepileptics need to be ordered) or if there is an difficulty with their distribution due to current situation.
- I always recommend for patients with epilepsy to have their medication stocked for at least a month in case they won't be able to get to it due to their disease or fallout of the medication. Your doctor can prescribe you the medication for 3 months maximum.
- Do not let your medication run out so you only have it for 1-2 days.
- **Do not cumulate the medication in unnecessarily large amount** so they don't expire and also so the isn't deficiency for other patients.
- **Do not quit using your medications under any circumstances, even if you are infected and required to take other medications. It could worsen your seizures.**
- **Some people with epilepsy must take medicaments that reduce immunity** (such as corticosteroids, immunotherapy) - these medicaments increase the risk of more severe symptoms and a more severe course of the coronavirus infection. If you are taking such medicaments, talk to your doctor about your treatment and follow the precautions carefully to minimize the risk of infection.
- **People with epilepsy might have other medical problems that might worsen the course of the disease**

- Limited mobility, long-term lying and swallowing disorders with higher risk of aspiration increase the risk of pneumonia
- People with heart diseases and diabetes are also at higher risk
- **In the event of an ongoing infection, many patients with epilepsy respond to an increase in temperature by epileptic seizures** - preferably use antipyretics based on paracetamol **unless you are allergic to it.**
- **Some medicaments used to treat infections may lower or increase the level of some antiepileptics, leading to seizures or drug intoxication** if you are not sure, contact your neurologist to see if such a combination is appropriate for your antiepileptic treatment – it includes mainly older anti-epileptics with active substances valproate, carbamazepine, phenytoin, phenobarbital, primidone
- **Since seizures may be aggravated by several factors associated with the infection, you may get epileptic seizures** if you are unable to eat and drink normally, if you throw up your medications or if you can not sleep normally. **Experiences from other countries affected by coronavirus show, that the risk of worsening of epileptic seizures in patients with epilepsy is generally low.** Make sure you sleep, eat and drink adequately and regularly to be able to take the medicine.
- **If it is necessary, your physician can prescribe you „safety medicine“ that are used in the treatment of acute epileptic seizures** - rectal diazepam, buccal midazolam, it is recommended to have a small supply of these medications at home.
- **If you are infected with the coronavirus and your seizures worsen, call your doctor first, do not go straight to the doctor's office to prevent infecting other patients.** Lot of patients infected with the coronavirus can be treated at home.
- **In case of seizure worsening without showing the signs of infection, contact your doctor by phone first to make sure he is at work.** Sometimes it is possible for some treatment to be adjusted by phone. Doctor decides if your personal visit is necessary. In case of a face-to-face consultation follow general recommendations for preventive measures - wear a mask and disposable gloves when visiting the doctor's office.
- **In the case of an acute life or health threatening seizure worsening, proceed as you usually would, call an ambulance and inform them about your possible contact with an infected person, if you are coming from an area with a wide spread of the virus or if you yourself are treated for the coronavirus. This is for the emergency staff to decide about the type of the sent ambulance**
- Follow general health guidelines and **follow general recommendations to prevent the coronavirus infection.**
- **In case you are quarantined, follow the rules of quarantine,** send someone else to get your medication.
- If you live alone, contact your relatives and friends regularly by phone or other means of electronic communication, talk about your questions and worries because stress can affect your seizures and your emotional state.

Some basic information about corona viruses:

These viruses belong to the group Coronaviridae. They are pleomorphic RNA viruses (round, oval or even ablong) with a spiral symmetry, 60 – 220 nm big. Human coronaviruses are divided into two genera – those belonging to the genus Coronavirus affect the respiratory tract and can cause cold or even pneumonia.

Until the year 2002, coronavirus infection only affected upper respiratory tracts or caused diarrhea.

The situation has worsened in years 2002-2003, when a new deadly disease SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) appeared. This disease is also caused by a coronavirus.

Coronavirus infection – disease (COVID-19):

It is a disease discovered in 2019. There was not identified a phylum responsible for this disease in humans until then. Currently, it causes a worldwide pandemic.

How should patients with epilepsy protect themselves?

WHO (the World Health Organization) recommends prevention against the virus, thorough personal and respirational hygiene, for not only patients, but also all people of all age groups.

For patients with epilepsy, professionals recommend to:

.a) The most effective way of protection is to stay at home

- patients with this disease should avoid contact with people until the situation gets better
- they should leave the house as little as possible
- if possible, order food delivery online and don't spend time in stores
- deal with problems and questions with your doctor and nurses by phone
- if possible, work from home to avoid travelling to and from work and therefore to avoid the contact with other people. Do meetings by phone or online.
- avoid meeting in larger groups

b) Follow basic hygiene practices and rules:

- wash your hands
- dedicate separate towels for each household member
- clean the household
- don't touch your face, nose, eyes or mouth if your hands are not clean
- clean often (especially surfaces, handles, doors, floors) and air the rooms
- do not socialize with people around you
- use masks even when taking out the trash
- use protection gloves when leaving the house
- in patients requiring nursing care, follow the sanitary measures as strictly as possible

c) Follow your diet

- follow your basic diet standards
- Patients are recommended a cereal diet (rice, oatmeal, for this situation – packaged baked goods)
- Legumes: these can be frozen or dried
- prefer buying food that is packaged

- keep your hydration plan: drink 8 – 10 cups of water a day, avoid buying soft drinks and drinking coffee
- prefer the products from Slovak production

d) Doctor´s visit

- in case of any complications, contact your professional first by phone to avoid the spread of the infection

These recommendations were issued by:

doc. MUDr. Gabriela Timarova, PhD.

Updated according to the current situation, 16.3.2020

This information was issued and published for patients in collaboration with professionals by the Berlina company. Thank you.

Dr. Katarina Sutovska, MBA

Other frequently asked questions based on the information from WHO:

In what areas is COVID-19 most frequently spread?

This disease is spread equally in all areas, despite different climate conditions.

Can cold weather kill the coronavirus?

There is no reason to assume that cold weather can kill the new coronavirus or other diseases. The normal temperature of the human body is around 36,5 °C to 37 °C without considering the outside temperature or weather. The most effective way of preventing the new coronavirus is washing hands frequently with soap and water or using hand sanitizers.

What to do when suspecting the infection COVID-19?

Contact your doctor (GP) by phone or call the call centres.

Phone numbers and e-mails for public regarding COVID-19:

The regional sector of the ministry of public health is strengthening their call centres in Slovakia. There is 36 phone lines available to public.

These phone lines of the ministry for public health are available non-stop:

- Úrad verejného zdravotníctva Slovenskej republiky – 0917 222 682
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Banskej Bystrici – 0918 659 580
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Bratislave – 0917 426 075
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Nitre – 0948 495 915
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Trnave - 0905 903 053
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Trenčíne – 0911 763 203
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Košiciach – 0918 389 841
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Prešove – 0911 908 823
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Žiline – 0905 342 812
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Bardejove - 0917 121 946
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Poprade - 0911 635 260, 0903 905 080
- RÚ verejného zdravotníctva so sídlom v Michalovciach - 0948 518 954

Phone contacts for public:

Inštitúcia	Call centrum	e-mail
ÚVZ SR	0917 222 682	novykoronavirus@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Bratislava	0917 426 075	X
RÚVZ Trnava	0905 903 053	
RÚVZ Senica	0907 169 312	se.koronavirus@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Galanta	0907 996 734	ga.epid@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Dunajská Streda	0910 459 200	ds.koronavirus@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Nitra	0948 495 915	nr.sekretariat@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Komárno	0911 305 651	koronaviruskn@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Levice	0910 901 129	lv.riaditel@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Nové Zámky	035/640 09 97	nz.epid@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Topoľčany	038/532 63 91	to.epid@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Trenčín	0917 763 203	tn.covid19@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Považská Bystrica	0911 727 930 042/44 50 233	pb.epid@uvzsr.sk
RÚVZ Prievidza	046/519 20 26	koronavirus@ruvzpd.sk
RÚVZ Žilina	0905 342 818	X
RÚVZ Čadca	0919 453 544	ca.koronavirus@uvzsr.sk

RÚVZ Dolný Kubín	0908 460 521	m.varmusova@gmail.com
RÚVZ Liptovský Mikuláš	0903 550 420	X
	0911 236 988	
	0903 540 635	
RÚVZ Martin	043/401 29 27	mt.epid@uvzs.sk
	0902 740 766	
	0911 514 878	
RÚVZ Banská Bystrica	0918 659 580	X
RÚVZ Zvolen	045/555 23 58	zv.epid@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Žiar nad Hronom	0911 214 488	zh.epid@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Lučenec	0905 536 551	lc.epidemiologia@vzs.sk
	0915 885 813	
	0918 601 924	
	047/43 235 72	
RÚVZ Veľký Krtíš	047/48 30 747	ruvzv@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Rimavská Sobota	0918 542 763	rs.epid@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Košice	0918 389 841	koronavirus@ruvzke.sk
RÚVZ Michalovce	0948 518 954	X
	056/6880 617	
	056/6880 621	
RÚVZ Rožňava	0905 439 276	rv.koronavirus@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Spišská Nová Ves	0910 118 266	X
RÚVZ Trebišov	059/67 24 993	tv.epid@uvzs.sk
	056/ 38 13 231	
	0918 680 305	
	0915 577 356	
RÚVZ Prešov	0911 908 823	X
RÚVZ Bardejov	0917 121 946	bj.epida@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Humenné	0908 440 174	hn.htc@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Poprad	0911 635 260	pp.epi@uvzs.sk pp.sekr@uvzs.sk pp.riaditel@uvzs.sk
	0903 905 080	
	052/772 2604	
	052/7125474	
	0902 543 162	
	0902 030 537	
RÚVZ Senica	0917149 459	
	034/6909327	
RÚVZ Stará Ľubovňa	0910 440 662	sl.epida@uvzs.sk
	0911 715 571	
RÚVZ Svidník	0910 580 707	sk.epidemiologia@uvzs.sk
RÚVZ Vranov nad Topľou	0915 783 454	

National centrum for medical information (non-stop) –0800 221 234

Can hand dryers kill the coronavirus?

No, hand dryers cannot kill the coronavirus. Hands need to be washed with soap and water or sanitize with alcohol. They need to be dried with clean paper wipes.

If you live at home with multiple family members, give all of them their own towel and wash it regularly.

Can the coronavirus be killed by using UV lamps?

No, it can not. Its use can cause various rashes or skin irritations.

Can eating garlic help?

There is no evidence that the consumption of garlic kills the coronavirus.

Do antibiotics help against the coronavirus?

Antibiotics do not help against the coronavirus. They are only used for the treatment of bacterial infections.

Does the coronavirus affect only old people?

People of all age groups can be infected with the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV). It seems that older people with existing health issues (such as asthma, diabetes, heart diseases) are more vulnerable for viruses. WHO recommends for people of all age groups to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene.

Do vaccines protect us from the new coronavirus?

There is currently no available vaccine that could protect us from the new coronavirus. The scientists are actively working on its development.

Resources:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<https://epilepsynewengland.org/news/coronavirus-information-for-people-affected-by-epilepsy-in-new-england>

<https://www.epilepsy.com/article/2020/3/concerns-about-covid-19-coronavirus-and-epilepsy>

<https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/epilepsy-and-coronavirus-covid-19-faqs#.XoonF3JnrIU>