

# Epilepsy and COVID-19

This factsheet covers those issues that are relevant to people with epilepsy.

For more general and up to date COVID-19 information, check out the following websites:

NHS Inform in Scotland <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19#overview>

Scottish Government <https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

## Does epilepsy increase your risk of getting COVID-19?

No. There is no evidence that you are more likely to get infected with COVID-19 if you have epilepsy and take anti-seizure medication, unless you have other underlying health conditions which may compromise your immune system. Having epilepsy does not mean your immune system is affected.

If you have any specific questions about your health or medication, please contact your epilepsy specialist nurse or GP. Your pharmacist may also be able to help with medication queries.

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

A study published in the British Medical Journal in October 2020 [BMJ 2020;371:m3731] concluded that people with epilepsy are more likely to experience COVID complications and are more likely to be admitted to hospital than the general population.

It does not mean you are more likely to get infected with COVID-19 though if you have epilepsy.

## Can COVID-19 trigger a seizure?

Yes. Just like getting the flu, feeling unwell, running a temperature or experiencing pain can trigger a seizure in some people.

COVID-19 symptoms vary depending on the current virus variant. Some people only experience very mild symptoms, so if you suspect you may have COVID-19, test yourself.

Be mindful that flu or COVID-19 symptoms can also affect your sleep, which can be another seizure trigger for some people.

## Are people with epilepsy eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. People who have epilepsy are currently eligible for the COVID-19 autumn 2023 booster as epilepsy falls under the clinical risk group.

For more information, check out the NHS Inform page on eligibility criteria [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccines you're eligible for | NHS inform](#).

## Is the vaccine safe for people with epilepsy?

All COVID-19 vaccines must go through a rigorous approval process by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority (MHRA) for safety and effectiveness.

According to the Association of British Neurologists, COVID-19 vaccines are safe for people with neurological conditions including epilepsy.

There is no known contraindication with anti-seizure medication. This means getting the vaccine should not interfere with the effectiveness of your medication.

## Possible vaccine side effects

COVID-19 vaccines, similar to the flu vaccine, can have side effects, usually for a brief period, such as a headache, tiredness or running a slight temperature. If this is a potential trigger for you, take it easy and rest after getting the COVID-19 booster. Make sure you stay well hydrated and seek medical advice if necessary.

If you have any concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine, contact your epilepsy specialist nurse or your neurologist.

## What should you do if you have COVID-19?

Do not stop taking your anti-seizure medication unless advised by your specialist. Even if you feel unwell, keep taking your medication exactly as prescribed. This is the most important measure you can take to protect yourself against increased seizures.

Drink water to stay hydrated, and ensure you get plenty of sleep. Seek medical advice if your symptoms are more severe.

If you are experiencing more seizures or they last longer, contact your epilepsy specialist nurse for medical advice.

# Are face masks safe for people with epilepsy?

Yes. Currently, there is no requirement to wear a face mask, however, some people may still prefer to wear one on public transport or in crowded places. There is no medical evidence to suggest wearing a face mask may trigger a seizure.

## Contact us

If you want to talk to us, have further questions, or want to share an experience, please contact our helpline on 0808 800 2200, get in touch via social media, or email [contact@epilepsyscotland.org.uk](mailto:contact@epilepsyscotland.org.uk).

**Our resources are always free. If you would like to support our work, please text FACTS to 70085 to donate £3. Texts cost £3 plus one standard rate message.**



[www.epilepsyscotland.org.uk](http://www.epilepsyscotland.org.uk)

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