

Statement from the Association for the Study of Obesity in Ireland (ASOI), The National Obesity Management Clinical Programme and the Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ICPO).

We understand that people living with obesity and their families are very concerned and worried about Covid-19. Unfortunately, many recent media reports have added to that concern, by including unreliable and misleading information.

While good quality scientific research on COVID 19 remains limited at this time, speculation, extrapolation and unproven theories are widespread. We have reviewed the current evidence on obesity and COVID 19, and found the following data to be the most reliable information at this point.

Obesity and COVID 19 Disease Severity

Studies have shown that there is a high prevalence of people with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity, admitted to hospital critical care units with COVID 19. This suggests that these conditions are associated with an increased risk of getting sicker if they develop COVID 19. Because of these studies, people living with obesity are considered as having an increased risk of more severe form of COVID 19 disease. This view is supported by many professional health organisations including the HSE, Public Health England, ASOI, EASO and The Obesity Society.

There is currently no scientific evidence that people with obesity remain asymptomatic with COVID 19 for longer, and no evidence that they have an increased risk of passing COVID 19 on to others.

There are a number of factors that may put people living with obesity at higher risk of a more severe form of COVID 19. Obesity is sometimes associated with lung diseases such as sleep apnoea and asthma, and heart disease which can reduce oxygen levels in the blood. People with obesity may also have other chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes or high blood pressure. Obesity can also be associated with impaired immune system function and an impaired response to bacterial and viral illness.

This increased risk does not apply equally to all people living with obesity. There needs to be more research in this area looking at the positive and negative effects of other medical conditions, medications, food, activity, stress and sleep on this risk.

What can we do?

There is a lot that people of any weight can do to reduce the risk of getting Covid-19 infection, and there is a lot that can be done to reduce the severity of the disease if you do get it. The following websites have very helpful and reliable information:

<https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/>

<https://easo.org/>

<https://www.worldobesity.org/>

Many people with obesity who are self-isolating and physically distancing have already encountered stigma in their daily life. Some people are already coping with low mood and depression. It's important that healthcare professionals and the media do not add further distress and worry with inaccurate and unproven statements about COVID 19.

Susie Birney of ICPO says “misleading information regarding the link between COVID-19 and obesity can only directly lead to increased stigma shown towards people living with obesity. People living with obesity are already currently subject to stigmatising memes regarding weight gain due to COVID lockdown. These are distressing times for all, and we would call on the media to be mindful to use People First language and to reducing stigma at every opportunity. We are indeed All in This Together.”

ASOI, the National Obesity Management Clinical Programme and ICPO will continue to support all people living with obesity, particularly in the area of challenging weight bias and stigma wherever we see it. We will update information on the links between obesity and COVID 19 as and when the scientific evidence changes.

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