



Dear Colleagues

On 12 December 2019, an unknown pneumonia case was detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Influenza and other Coronavirus were excluded as possible causes of the Pneumonia. This was followed by an outbreak of Severe Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which spread across China. The Coronavirus has since spread to more than 200 countries, including South Africa.

COVID-19 is a new disease and as such there is limited information regarding risk factors. Based on currently available clinical information from the medical experts, **older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions** might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Based on available information, those at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are people 65 years and older and those people of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, which include, amongst others:

- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma;
- People who have serious heart conditions;
- People who are immunocompromised:
  - Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone-marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications.
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher);
- People with diabetes;
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis; and
- People with liver disease.

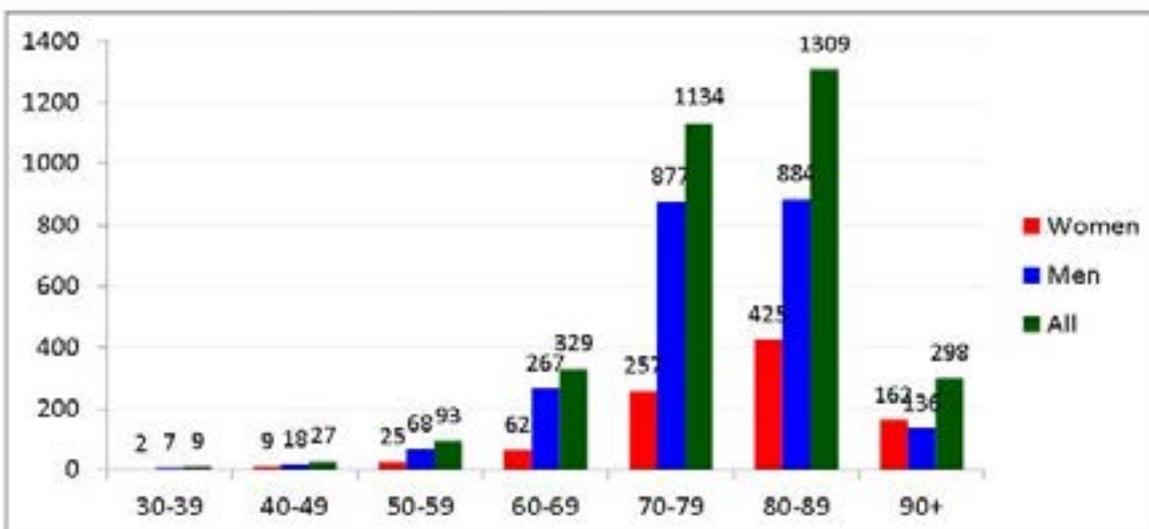
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), among 178 (12%) adult patients with data on underlying conditions as of March 30, 2020, 89.3% had one or more underlying conditions; the most common were hypertension (49.7%), obesity (48.3%), chronic lung disease (34.6%), diabetes mellitus (28.3%), and cardiovascular disease (27.8%). These findings suggest that older adults have elevated rates of COVID-19–associated hospitalization and the majority of persons hospitalized with COVID-19 have underlying medical conditions. These findings underscore the importance of preventive measures (e.g., physical distancing, respiratory hygiene, and wearing face coverings in public settings where physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain) to protect older adults and persons with underlying medical conditions, as well as the general public. In addition, older adults and persons with serious underlying medical conditions should avoid contact with persons who are ill and immediately contact their health care provider(s) if they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>).

Research that has been conducted in Italy on the Pre-existing medical conditions shows the following on the characteristics of COVID-19 patients dying in Italy. Report based on available data on March 20th, 2020:

**Table 1: Most common comorbidities observed in COVID-19 positive deceased patients**

<b>Diseases</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>schemic heart disease</i>	145	30.1
<i>Atrial Fibrillation</i>	106	22.0
<i>Stroke</i>	54	11.2
<i>Hypertension</i>	355	73.8
<i>Diabetes</i>	163	33.9
<i>Dementia</i>	57	11.9
<i>COPD</i>	66	13.7
<i>Active cancer in the past 5 years</i>	94	19.5
<i>Chronic liver disease</i>	18	3.7
<i>Chronic renal failure</i>	97	20.2
<b>Number of comorbidities</b>		
<i>0 comorbidities</i>	6	1.2
<i>1 comorbidity</i>	113	23.5
<i>2 comorbidities</i>	128	26.6
<i>3 comorbidities and over</i>	234	48.6

**Figure 1: Absolute number of deaths by age group**



(source: [https://www.epicentro.iss.it/coronavirus/bollettino/Report-COVID-2019\\_20\\_marzo\\_eng.pdf](https://www.epicentro.iss.it/coronavirus/bollettino/Report-COVID-2019_20_marzo_eng.pdf))

Let us continue to keep safe, and courageous with the full belief that we have the power and resolve to defeat the sting of this virus.

For more information on CDC's Protocols on COVID-19, please visit COVID-19 Online Portal: <http://www.coega.co.za/DocumentList.aspx?cmd=browse&objID=80&catID=2065>. We welcome your suggestion on the CDC's anonymous online suggestion box: <http://intranet/Electronicsuggestionbox.asp>.

Kind regards,

***COVID19 Task team***