COVID-19 and Spinal Cord Injury/Brain Injury

As COVID-19 (coronavirus) continues to spread across the world, we understand that there are many concerns in our community about health and safety. If you have any questions about your personal health, please first call your primary care physician. We also have a public emergency hotline that can be reached at 303-789-8888, and Craig's Nurse Advice Line is available for non-emergency medical questions about SCI and BI Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mountain Time, at 800-247-0257.

For up-to-date information about what Craig Hospital is doing in response to COVID-19 and updates on any cancellations or changes in screening and visitor policies at Craig, please visit our COVID-19 Updates page. Other great resources on general COVID-19 information are the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and your state's Health Department. To learn more about what community resources you can access in Colorado, call 2-1-1.

What is COVID-19 (coronavirus)?
COVID-19 is a virus that affects the respiratory system and can lead to pneumonia, and its primary symptoms are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Illness can be severe and require hospitalization, but most individuals recover by resting, drinking plenty of liquids, and taking medications their medical provider advises them to take. Its name stands for Coronavirus Disease of 2019.

How does COVID-19 spread?
The virus mainly spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets from coughs or sneezes. These droplets then land on surfaces - even on people if close enough - and can live on these surfaces for various amounts of time. When you touch that surface, you then have those germs on you; this is why good hand washing or sanitizing is so important in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

How to avoid getting COVID-19
People who have been to areas where widespread community transmission is occurring are at risk of infection, as well as people who have had direct close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

We encourage everyone to follow the CDC guidelines to prevent exposure to and spread of COVID-19. This includes:

- Wash your hands regularly using soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, then use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, especially with unwashed hands.
- If you use a wheelchair, disinfect areas you touch frequently, like the handrims.
- Avoid contact with people who are already sick.
- Practice "social distancing" by avoiding contact with others and maintaining a minimum of six feet of distance from people in your community to help stop the spread of COVID-19.
- Minimize your exposure to others outside your household when possible but be sure you have everything you need to stay healthy. Talk with your physician, pharmacy and medical supplies provider about refills and home delivery options to ensure you have at least a month's supply of important medical supplies and prescriptions. Limit visits to stores by getting a 1-2 week supply of grocery and toiletries for your household with each visit or shop during special hours for high-risk populations at stores that offer them, if appropriate.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue if you have to cough or sneeze, and throw that tissue into the trash. Then immediately wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer.
- Wear a face mask if you are sick and interacting with others. Do not wear a face mask if you are not sick unless you are caring for someone who is sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces daily with a household cleaning spray.

What to do if your caregiver gets sick

The Center for Disability Rights has a comprehensive list of things to consider if you have a caregiver. Read their full list here.

- Ensure that you have sufficient backup attendants in case your regular attendants cannot work.
- Ensure that you have the ability to get assistance if an attendant does not show up for work.
- Have at least a week of non-perishable food in your home at any given time and identify people who can assist with shopping.
- Stock up on (but don't hoard) important supplies like paper and hygiene products.
- Identify a way to make sure you can get your medications in a timely manner. Talk with your physician, pharmacy and medical supply provider about refill and delivery options to ensure you have at least a month's supply of important medical supplies and prescriptions.
- Plan for your pets, such as food or pet sitting if you are hospitalized.
- Have your attendants wash their hands and use hand sanitizer when they arrive at your home and each time prior to touching or feeding you.
- Regularly clean, sanitize and disinfect the surfaces that are touched in your home to prevent the spread of infection.
- Have your attendant take extra steps to avoid possibly infecting you by wearing a surgical mask if someone close to your attendant–like a member of their household–becomes sick.
- If your attendant becomes sick, urge them to seek medical care, and utilize your backup attendants.
- Take immediate steps to avoid infecting your attendants if you, one of your attendants or a member of your household begins to feel sick.
- If you become sick, seek medical care immediately.

What to do if you think you might be sick

If you feel like there is a chance that you may have COVID-19, call your primary care physician. They will work to make sure you receive the proper testing to determine whether or not you have COVID-19 and if you require a hospital visit or isolation.

What to do if you use a ventilator

Since COVID-19 is a respiratory disease, people who use ventilators are at much greater risk from the virus. It is important that you avoid contact with people who might have COVID-19 and avoid areas where community transmission is known to be happening. Follow CDC guidelines like washing your hands, avoiding touching your face and social distancing.

How to help manage anxiety

This is a stressful time for everyone, and it's important to take the time to breathe, stretch, exercise and practice some self-care.

Here are a few resources from Craig to help you manage anxiety:

- **Get good sleep:** Sleep is essential for staying healthy and being able to focus, so if you're feeling distracted and having trouble sleeping, check out our five tips for better sleep.
- **Practice yoga:** As a therapy, yoga can help quiet the mind and reduce stress and anxiety. We've got suggestions for people with brain injuries on incorporating yoga into their lives.
- **Start meditation:** Focusing on your breath and clearing your mind is great for improving your mental and physical well-being. Check out our suggestions for people with spinal cord and brain injuries, including several guided meditations in both English and Spanish.
- **Stay connected:** It's important to practice social distancing right now, but that doesn't mean that you have to cut yourself off completely from family and friends. Stay connected with your community through technology, like using the resources in our Assistive Technology Resource Library.