

COVID-19, Omicron and SCI – what should we know in particular?

Please Note: Parts of this document may change over time as policies/regulations/arrangements evolve so this document will be updated as these changes occur. All updates will be summarised in this table here:

Version & Date	Details
ver 1 - 4 th Feb 2022	Initial release version

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Carer questions

[Question: If my household is in isolation \(me or a family member has tested COVID-19 positive or is awaiting a test result\) will my carers still come into my home.](#)

Answer – It depends!

It either depends on your Agency's policy regarding this or if you employ or contract your own carers, it depends on what you've agreed with them directly.

For the Agency folks we STRONGLY recommend that you contact your Agency ASAP to confirm with them what their policy is. According to the Ministry of Health, all Agencies are expected to continue to deliver critical cares – even when your household is isolating – and it seems most

(maybe all) say they will continue with care under these circumstances but it is still important to have this confirmed for your own situation.

Additionally, it is expected that all Agencies should be contacting you NOW to confirm which of the cares being delivered for you are 1) Must Have (critical) 2) Highly desirable or 3) Could go on hold.

If you've not heard from your Agency about this then you really need to contact your Care Coordinator immediately to have these details confirmed. Or if employing/contracting your own care team – have that conversation now!

Question: What if no Carers can come at all?

If things get super bad and so many people are infected and/or isolating in the wider community - Everyone really needs to have their own back-up plan for critical personal cares. You need to plan for two scenarios:

If your household is not in isolation, talk to family, friends, neighbours about whether they might be able step in and help for what should only be a few occasions. Tricky things like catheter changes shouldn't be done but many other things may be possible.

We know this may be easier said than done but when all else fails people have to be ultimately responsible for their own care and it's really important to plan for this now i.e. before it is suddenly required without any notice.

If your household is in isolation, then other family, friends, neighbours aren't supposed to come into your house. You will need to make it clear to your Agency that you are in isolation and the Agency will have an emergency phone number to ring to arrange care. If not using an Agency, the NZ Spinal Trust is working on finding out this emergency phone number(s) so contact us.

If still no luck putting together a back-up plan then contact the NZ Spinal Trust's (Burwood Spinal Unit region) (peer.support@nzspinaltrust.org.nz) or Spinal Support NZ's (Auckland Spinal Rehab Unit region) (info@spinalsupport.nz) Peer Support team. The Peer Support team's networks can help find out if there is anyone else in your community who could come and do emergency cares.

Medical questions

In a nutshell, based on data from around the world, SCI people are NO more likely to contract, need to be hospitalised and most importantly, are no more likely to die of COVID-19 than anyone else. There are no specific precautions that will protect SCI people from this infection.

So the details about how COVID affects SCI people and what to do if you suspect you've got it etc. are pretty much the same for SCI people as they are for the general population.

Tetras and high Paras who have diminished respiratory function or have weakness of the chest muscles as a result of spinal cord injury, will need to look out for getting more breathless, or increased need for assistance to clear secretions from your lungs, and seek medical advice early. But even with that reduced function Paras and Tetra aren't any more likely to get COVID initially.

Question: What should we do to prepare NOW?

- Get Vaccinated and Boosted
 - This is the single most effective thing you can do
- Have 14 days (at least) emergency supplies
 - Food, water and cleaning products
 - Consumables (catheters, wipes, hand sanitiser, blue-ies etc.)
 - PPE (masks, gloves, gowns (better than aprons)
 - Your prescription medicines
 - Other medicines – Paracetamol, cough lozenges, Vicks
 - Thermometer and if possible a Pulse Oximeter
- Complete “Your Household Plan – for COVID-19” - https://www.nzspinaltrust.org.nz/documents/46/YourHouseholdPlan_blank.pdf and stick it to the fridge

Question: How do we know if we’ve got it?

Most people who get COVID-19 and in particular the Omicron variant will have mild symptoms. These are:

- Cough
 - especially a dry cough
- Sore throat
 - for Omicron this might not be very sore
- Runny nose
 - more likely with Omicron than other variants
- Fever
 - Not as likely for Omicron but could do for other variants
- Other symptoms are possible
 - Sore tummy, diarrhoea etc.

If you have any of the above symptoms, you can drive to your nearest drive-through testing centre (tends to get results faster!) or you can contact your GP to arrange a test. Or you may be able to get a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) from your local pharmacy (very few available as at 4/2/2022 but supposedly stocks will be available soon). If the RAT is positive you should also then go and get a PCR test (i.e. testing centre or your GP’s carpark). Remember to isolate until you get the result.

But if you have any difficulty with breathing or become breathless or are becoming very unwell (high fever etc.), immediately phone 111 for an ambulance.

Question: What should we do for ourselves at home?

- Keep away from others (2m distance) unless you’re all wearing good PPE
- Take Paracetamol, cough lozenges, Vicks vapo rub to manage symptoms
- Keep your room well ventilated
- Remember to keep well hydrated
- Rest and recover

Question: If feeling really unwell what should we do?

Immediately phone **111** for an ambulance.

In particular do this if you have difficulty with breathing or become breathless or start to run a high fever.

Question: What should I do if I'm admitted to hospital?

1. At the start (i.e. probably in the Emergency Dept) insist that the hospital notifies the Spinal Unit (either Auckland or Burwood depending on where you are) about your admission with COVID-19 or any other problem.
2. Insist that if anyone (Doctors or Nurses or anyone else) is at all unsure about something they should contact the appropriate Spinal Unit for the answers.
3. It's likely that you won't be allowed to bring your own Carer Team on the ward like you may have been allowed to do previous to COVID becoming an issue, so it will be especially important that you make sure you are your own best 'self advocate'.

Things like:

- Do staff know how to use the hoist properly?
- Demand a proper mattress
- Understand what drugs you're getting and confirm that your current medications are still okay
- Confirm bladder/bowel requirements if going to be in bed for awhile e.g. explain when your next bowel motion is required, is an in-dwelling catheter required etc.

i.e. Take Charge!!

Question: What should we do if we're not coping very well?

Talk frequently to friends/family on the phone – much better than just doing social media.

Or call:

- NZ Spinal Trust's Peer Support team – either your local person or Meika Reid (027 4488 323) or Brett Ladbrook (027 224 5789) or Andrew Hall (021 439 781).
- Spinal Support NZ's Peer Support team – either your local person or Yashmeen Johal (021 125 2960) or Georgia Cameron (021 217 1467)

Other Useful Resources for getting Ready Now!

There are a huge number of different resources online but here's a brief list of what we think are probably the most useful ones for NZers with SCI (list may be added to over time):

- What you need for your COVID-19 Care Kit – video by Ma'a Brian Sagala:
<https://www.facebook.com/preparepacific/videos/662788331699453>
- Blank version of "Your Household Plan – for COVID-19" -
https://www.nzspinaltrust.org.nz/documents/46/YourHouseholdPlan_blank.pdf
- Checklist for "COVID-19 Our Isolation Plan" -
<https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/posters/COVID-19-Readiness-Checklist.pdf>
- Guidance for Household Close Contacts - https://www.cdhb.health.nz/wp-content/uploads/346612aa-guidance_for_household_close_contacts_-_any_vaccination_status-v2.pdf