

Life Support During the COVID Pandemic

This is an unusual time, with very large numbers of very sick people right now. Some people are getting so sick that they need a life support machine (like a ventilator or breathing machine – see picture).

Because of the current pandemic, there might not be enough life support machines for everyone who needs them. Hopefully, this does not happen.

In this very difficult time, it's really important to be clear about your values and main concerns for your health care.



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How would decisions about who gets a life support machine be made?

If there is a shortage, a team of doctors and nurses will review all cases of patients who need life support machines. This team will make tough decisions based on the best medical information available. The team will not be given information about patient race, ethnicity, religion, insurance or other unrelated things.

What are my choices?

You may not have a choice. But this is an important time to think about what you would want. People often have thoughts about life support machines.

- Some people say, *"I would like to have a life support machine if there is one."*
- Others may say, *"I want a life support machine if there is one, but first think of others who may be more likely to survive."*
- A third group of people may say, *"I do not want any kind of life support or breathing machine. If it comes to that, please let me have a natural death."*

For people who do not get life support machines, care and treatment will focus on the relief of pain and suffering. The goal is to make sure patients are comfortable.

Your health care team **and your loved ones** need to know what you want if you need a life support machine.

If you become sick enough to need a life support machine, what would you want?

- I **want** to be on a life support machine, if a machine is available.
- I want one **if it is available**, but first consider others who may be more likely to survive. I understand this would mean that I am more likely to die.
- I **don't want one**, even if it is available. I understand this would mean that I am more likely to die.

Are you sure that your answer above says what you really want?

- Yes, I understand and my answer above says what I really want.
- No, I need to ask questions and talk to a doctor and my loved ones before I can be sure.

What are the next steps?

Even if you do not know the answers to the above questions right now, you should do one very important thing:

- Name a **health care agent**:
 - The agent is the person who speaks for you if you can't speak for yourself.
 - The document where you identify your agent is called a Medical Power of Attorney.
 - Make sure you have one, and that your health care team knows about it.
- Talk to this person so they know what is truly important to you. **This is the most important step.**

This is a hard time for everyone. We're all working together. Please continue this conversation with your medical team with any questions you may have.