

What athletes should know about COVID-19, heart damage and working out

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(HealthDay)—With evidence mounting that COVID-19 can damage the heart, experts urge people to take precautions when doing vigorous exercise.

Up to 30% of patients hospitalized with [coronavirus infection](#) have signs of cardiac injury, according to Dr. Sunal Makadia, health director of sports cardiology at LifeBridge Health in Baltimore.

The prevalence of heart damage in milder cases of COVID-19 is unknown. Still, experts worry about the potential for serious heart complications from engaging in [vigorous exercise](#) while infected with the virus.

The American College of Cardiology's Sports and Exercise Council recommends that people get a COVID-19 test and heart screening before playing sports or exercising.

Even if they show no symptoms, those who test positive for COVID-19 should avoid exercise for at least two weeks, Makadia recommended.

"After this, you can return to activity after being evaluated by a medical professional or cardiologist," he said in a health system news release.

Symptoms such as shortness of breath, [chest pain](#), a fluttering or a rapid heartbeat, lightheadedness, leg swelling, muscle pains and unexplained fatigue may indicate a severe heart problem.

"We're still learning more, but those with [high blood pressure](#), high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, and previous heart issues such as [coronary artery disease](#), stents or coronary bypass surgery and [heart failure](#) are susceptible to the most severe complications of COVID-19," Makadia said.

Experts suggest exercising outdoors rather than indoors.

While training alone is ideal, Makadia said people who elect to exercise with a group should double the standard social distancing guideline from 6 feet to 12 feet.

When running in a group, do not place yourself "downstream," or directly behind another runner, to avoid aerosolized droplets that can spread the coronavirus.

"Wear masks unless you are absolutely alone," Makadia added.

Finally, as gyms and communal training facilities reopen, remember to practice good hygiene. Wash your hands and any equipment you use, bring your own towels, and avoid water fountains and crowded areas.

More information: There's more about COVID-19 and heart health at the [American Heart Association](#).

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