

Your to-do list as you await a COVID vaccine

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As COVID-19 spreads across the country and vaccines are not yet widely available, it's important to plan for what you would do if you become infected with the virus, says a psychologist who's counseled

critically ill and recovering patients.

"We can't let our guard down while we wait our turn for the vaccine," said rehabilitation psychologist Abigail Hardin, from Rush University Medical Center in Chicago.

In addition to continuing to take protective measures such as social distancing and wearing masks, Hardin recommends asking yourself a series of questions to help you plan for what you would do if you get sick.

Ask yourself where you'll quarantine and, if you're a caregiver, who will care for your children or elderly relatives. Know where your insurance card is located, consider what in-network hospital you would choose and think about who needs to know you're ill, including who you may have exposed to the virus.

Then, pack a COVID-19 kit for yourself and your [family members](#) to help put your mind at ease. The kit could include copies of your [insurance card](#), driver's license and prescriptions. You could add a set of comfortable clothing, a phone charger, a pen and a notebook.

"Our brains don't work as well when we're under stress," Hardin said in a university news release. "It's much easier to handle a tough situation when you have what you need ready."

Assess and address your health, Hardin suggests. People with underlying [health conditions](#), including obesity, [high blood pressure](#) and diabetes, may have more [severe illness](#) or long-term effects from COVID-19. If you can get your [blood pressure](#) and blood sugar levels under control now, you may reduce your risk of complications later.

Add healthy habits, including getting good sleep and getting more

sunshine, if possible. If you smoke, quit. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation, which is a drink a day for women and two for men.

Hardin also recommends making sure you have a will and an advance directive, in case you need it. There are several types of advance directives, including a living will, medical power of attorney/durable power of attorney for health care, do not resuscitate (DNR) order and practitioner order for life-sustaining treatment (POLST).

Your family lawyer can create these documents for you, but there are other ways that cost little or no money. Choose someone you trust to have "power of attorney" and make [health care](#) decisions on your behalf in case you cannot communicate for yourself.

"Thinking about death can be overwhelming," Hardin said. "But preparing a will and talking through what care you would want if you were very ill now can save your loved one from the pain of trying to decide for you without knowing what you would want."

Stay mentally and emotionally strong by scheduling times to connect with family and friends remotely, she advised. Call a friend when you're lonely. Find a therapist if you need to talk. If you or a family member is struggling to cope, feeling helpless or hopeless, reach out for professional help.

"I've been with patients as they've fought and survived COVID-19," Hardin said. "Knowing what to expect and being prepared can only help you to survive and thrive."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has [more information on COVID-19](#).

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