



COVID-19 Disproportionately Affects Limb Loss and Limb Difference Community

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the limb loss and limb difference community:

- Overall amputation rates have risen due to COVID-19 as the disease causes dangerous blood clots that can lead to limb loss.
- People living with limb loss and limb difference are at higher risk for COVID-19 infection because the underlying health conditions that most often result in amputation, such as diabetes and cancer, are the same conditions that make people more vulnerable to COVID-19.
- Even with telehealth options, the pandemic has made it more difficult for people to access care they need, from at-risk patients forgoing routine doctor's visits that would prevent amputation to people living with limb loss and limb difference not being able to visit specialists to adjust their assistive device to prevent further limb damage.
- Suicide rates for veterans with limb loss have increased as social isolation has taken its toll during the pandemic.

These many challenges are illustrated in the quotes and statistics below.

COVID-19 Increases Amputations

- "Health experts are now encountering a rare and terrifying COVID-19 complication: plug-like blood clots in the limbs of coronavirus victims that strangle circulation. And that means you could lose a limb to COVID-19, even if you don't lose your life." ([SunSentinel](#))
- "In a recently published study in the *Annals of Vascular Surgery*, researchers found a more than twofold increase in major amputations and the degree of tissue loss for vascular surgery patients after the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 in comparison to patients in similar time frames in 2019 and 2018." ([Podiatry Today](#))
- "Patients with diabetes were 10.8 times more likely to undergo any level of amputation and 12.5 times more likely to receive a major amputation (transfemoral or transtibial) during the pandemic." ([Diabetes-Related Amputations: A Pandemic Within A Pandemic](#))
- "COVID-19 patients may be at an increased risk of dangerous blood clotting in their legs that could potentially lead to amputation or even death. ...[Inessa Goldman, MD] said that outcomes were often "dire," including a 25% increased risk of amputation and 38% higher danger of death compared to the control group." ([Radiology Business](#))
- "The coronavirus can lead to kidney failure and blood clots that result in the amputation of limbs. ...What was recognized about a month ago is that many of these patients with severe illness, those that were hospitalized, were experiencing blood clots. It appears that this virus activates the coagulation cascades in a way that increases the risk of blood clots." ([CBS Pittsburgh](#))



People with Limb Loss and Limb Difference are at Higher Risk for COVID-19

- The same underlying medical conditions that put individuals at higher risk for limb loss, such as cancer and diabetes, also put them at increased risk from COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- “Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show more than three-quarters of people who died from Covid-19 had at least one preexisting condition. Overall, diabetes was noted as an underlying condition for approximately 4 in 10 patients. Among people younger than 65 who died from the infection, about half had diabetes.” (STAT)

COVID-19 Makes it Harder to Access Needed Care for People with Limb Loss and Limb Difference

- “Conclusion: There is a delay in accessing the health care delivery for non-COVID conditions resulting in more amputations of limbs and resections of the bowel.” (Annals of Medicine and Surgery)
- “Although health officials have been successful in keeping hospital inpatient beds and emergency departments open for surges of COVID-19 patients, some Americans who desperately need care are delaying it -- or going without it altogether. This situation is distressing, particularly for the estimated 20 million Americans suffering from limb-threatening conditions, such as peripheral artery disease, that require prompt intervention to prevent lower limb amputation.” (MedPage Today)
- “The COVID-19 lockdown may have had a detrimental impact on amputation risk because of the sudden interruption of diabetic foot ulceration (DFU) care and lower limb preservation pathways, resulting in delayed diagnosis and treatment. DFU is often characterized by progressive clinical course, which can rapidly lead patients to critical worsening of their ulcers. Of note, we found a higher proportion of patients admitted for emergency and a lower number of patients coming from regular outpatient access among the individuals admitted during the lockdown than those of the 2019 cohort.” (Diabetes Care)
- “While most agree that telehealth offers benefits relative to health, safety, and patient convenience, they also agree with the American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics, and Pedorthics (ABC) position that "due to the hands-on nature of O&P care, providers must recognize that elements of the services they provide cannot be accomplished virtually." And the benefits of telehealth don't come without risks, experts warn.” (O&P Edge)

Veteran Suicide Risks Increasing Due to COVID-19

- “As coronavirus restrictions unfurled a dangerous mix of depression and anxiety, the scourge of suicide cut through a tiny community of amputee veterans in recent months, claiming at least three in a group where isolation is already a potent risk factor.” (Washington Post)



- “People with traumatic amputations have higher levels of anxiety and depression, according to a spokesman for Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., where amputee service members and veterans have received physical and mental care.” ([Washington Post](#))
- “Roger Brooks, a senior mental health specialist at the Wounded Warrior Project, said veterans are reporting increased suicidal symptoms and anxiety. Between April and the end of August, the group saw a 48% jump in referrals to mental health providers and a 10% increase in mental health calls and virtual support sessions, compared to the previous five months. Brooks said there’s anecdotal evidence that the pandemic has made wounded warriors like amputees feel more isolated, unable to connect as well with support groups. He said injured vets have seen disruptions in medical visits for pain management and other treatments.” ([Washington Post](#))