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## Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice

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**International  
Diabetes  
Federation**



### International Diabetes Federation

# Why access to diabetes care must not be another victim of the COVID-19 pandemic



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on a wide range of industries, including the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors, impacting supply chains and affecting people who need treatment and support for a wide range of conditions. The approval of a vaccine is of course a reason for celebration as it can end the current global health and financial crises.

The unprecedented events of the past 12 months have caused disruption to the supply chain in some countries, with essential diabetes medicines, including insulin, not always reaching the people that need them most. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) has received reports from some of its members on the need to support the distribution of supplies to people who are stuck at home. We have also received reports of price hikes applied to diabetes medication at the point of purchase in some countries. IDF estimates that 463 million people worldwide live with diabetes, many of whom require the daily administration of insulin for survival or other forms of treatment to manage their condition to avoid complications.

This year marks the centenary of the discovery of insulin and IDF is urging governments and healthcare authorities to ensure care is accessible and affordable for people living with diabetes.

## 1. Impact on supply chains

The restrictions put in place to tackle the spread of COVID-19 and the resulting relocation of healthcare resources have disrupted access to care throughout the pandemic. While measures have been essential to stop virus transmissions, their implementation has impacted people living with non-communicable diseases who rely on continuous treatment and support. Diabetes is no exception.

IDF is urging governments and healthcare systems to ensure that COVID-19 precautions and restrictions do not hamper people's ability to access life-saving care. If people with type 1 diabetes cannot access insulin, their lives will be lost.

Many people with type 2 diabetes rely on insulin and or other medicines to manage their condition. These include medications to prevent or delay the severe long-term compli-

cations associated with diabetes, such as blindness, cardiac arrest, stroke, lower-limb amputation and kidney failure.

## 2. A double-edged sword

Disruptions in the supply of medication and care are not the only cause for concern during the current COVID-19 crisis. People with diabetes, particularly those with poorly-managed blood glucose levels, are more susceptible to the severe effects of COVID-19. If a person with diabetes develops a viral infection, it can be harder to treat due to fluctuations in blood glucose levels and, possibly, the presence of diabetes complications. Analysis of COVID-19 patients has shown that, depending on the global region, up to half of people with the virus also live with diabetes.

Since the outbreak, many people diabetes have spent more time at home to protect themselves from catching the virus. This, together with the social distancing restrictions in place, have made it more difficult for people with diabetes to exercise regularly and stay physically active - essential components of diabetes management. Many have chosen to delay or cancel healthcare appointments. Without these appointments, people with diabetes lose out on the support they need to manage their condition and may increase their risk of complications.

## 3. Saving lives for a century and beyond

This year, IDF is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin, a medication that has saved millions of lives around the world and improved the quality of life for many more.

Further discoveries over the past century have contributed to improvements in diabetes care that support people living with all types of diabetes to manage their condition and avoid serious complications. Research has also proven how important mental health support, diet and exercise are to effective diabetes management. While the restrictions put in place to halt the spread of COVID-19 have been effective in curbing the impact of the virus, they cannot come at the cost of restricting care for people living with diabetes. Where possi-

ble, health professionals should consider care in the community or telemedicine as alternatives to bringing high-risk individuals into the clinical environment.

Diabetes care and education has helped many to manage their diabetes despite difficult circumstances. Continued and increased investment is required not only to protect and provide care for people with diabetes during COVID-19 but, with the growing concern over the long-term impact of the pandemic, for many years to come.

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