

Obesity 'trebles risk of virus hospital admission'

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Obese people are three times as likely to be admitted to hospital after catching the coronavirus, a senior UAE health official said.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention has launched an awareness programme about the link between obesity and more severe cases of Covid-19.

Health experts said very overweight people and those with chronic diseases were especially vulnerable to infection.

"Since the early days of the pandemic, the ministry has paid special attention to obese patients and those with chronic diseases and has accordingly assigned them special health care," said Dr Hussein Al Rand, assistant undersecretary for centres and health clinics.

"They have been given priority in lab and home testing to limit their contact with others in health centres and are among the priority groups in receiving the Covid-19 jabs."

Dr Al Rand said people with underlying conditions should take care to avoid the virus.

"People with chronic conditions such as asthma and lung disease, cardiovascular problems, uncontrolled diabetes, severe obesity, a weakened immune system due to diseases such as HIV or who are undergoing cancer treatment must be more careful to protect themselves against the virus," he said.

He said the severity of Covid-19 increased in those over the age of 60.

Dr Fadila Sharif, director of health education and promotion at the ministry, said: "Statistics show that obesity triples the risks of hospitalisation in case of infection, as obesity is associated with weak immunity and reduces lung capacity, making it difficult to breathe." Obesity has long been a concern in the UAE. It was ranked 26th on the Global Obesity Observatory's list of countries with high percentages of obesity, which was released in April.

A 2019 study of 33,000 Emirati men, carried out by Zayed Military Hospital in Abu Dhabi, found 58 per cent were overweight or obese at 18, rising to 71 per cent by the age of 29.

"People are too quick to get surgery to try to solve their issues with obesity," said Dr Ayman Soliman, a consultant in laparoscopic and bariatric surgery at Medcare Hospital Al Safa.

"It's better to focus more on a healthy diet and getting proper exercise than just relying on surgery to fix the issues."

Researchers at the Arabian Wellness and Lifestyle Management centre at RAK Hospital studied more than 3,200 people in the emirate to understand Covid-19 risk factors.

The results, released in February, found overweight people were 62 per cent more likely to develop complications.

Patients with a diet heavy in fast food were 51 per cent more at risk; smokers 45 per cent; and people aged 50 and older 40 per cent.