

# Physical Inactivity Linked to Severe COVID-19 Outcomes:

## Health Care Systems Should Adopt Physical Activity Vital Sign

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A [study of nearly 50,000 COVID-19 patients](#) from [Kaiser Permanente Southern California](#) showed physical inactivity as a stronger risk factor for severe COVID-19 than heart disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, smoking and obesity. Patients representing a diverse sample of adults were diagnosed with COVID-19 and self-reported physical activity during outpatient visits over the prior two years. The results were adjusted for demographics, along with the CDC-identified risk factors for severe COVID-19, and show:

- Being consistently inactive (0-10 min/week of physical activity) more than doubled the odds of hospitalization.
- Patients who were consistently inactive had 1.73 times greater odds of ICU admission.
- The odds for death were 2.49 times greater for patients who were consistently inactive.
- **Other than being over age 60 or having a history of organ transplant, being consistently inactive conferred the highest risk for death from COVID-19.**

Even patients who did some physical activity had lower odds for severe COVID-19 when compared to those who were regularly active, suggesting that any amount of physical activity has benefit. Other studies have confirmed these findings.

### What Does this Mean for Health Care?

Health care systems can take a few simple steps to more easily identify and support physically inactive patients and ultimately help improve individual and population health.



Integrate a simple, validated two-question [physical activity vital sign \(PAVS\)](#) into the electronic health record and outpatient clinical workflow to risk-stratify patients into those who need physical activity support.



Encourage patients to follow a “[Sit Less. Move More.](#)” approach recommended by the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2018. Data shows that all physical activity counts – even short bouts of less than 10 minutes a day.



Refer patients to community programs, facilities and professionals to help them become more physically active.



Use this [Health Care Provider Action Guide](#) for effective tools to integrate physical activity into daily practice.

Interventions to help patients become more physically active, even in a modest way, will relieve the burden of COVID-19 care and reduce the burden of costly chronic medical conditions.

Contact [eim@acsm.org](mailto:eim@acsm.org) if you would like more information.