

## **Media Contact**

Kim Waterman  
kimberly.waterman@nm.org  
630.220.4083 - cell



## **Obesity Linked to Higher Risk of Complications from COVID-19**

***Attribute to:** Elizabeth Lowden, MD, medical director of medical weight management at the Northwestern Medicine Metabolic Health and Surgical Weight Loss Center at Delnor Hospital*

**According to the CDC, severe obesity, defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above, puts people at higher risk for complications from COVID-19. Why is obesity a risk factor?**

There are significant hormonal and metabolic implications behind increased adiposity, and many of the comorbidities that have been associated with severe COVID-19 are also associated with obesity. There is not enough data to note causation, but obesity-related comorbidities certainly appear to be correlating with the severity of the disease in many patients. Further research will hopefully guide us as to why this is the case.



**Elizabeth Lowden, MD**  
Bariatric Endocrinology  
Northwestern Medicine  
Delnor Hospital

More concerning as health care practitioners may be the limitations in effective respiratory care and ventilation management particularly in those with morbid obesity. These apparent increased risks and known respiratory complications have prompted the Northwestern Medicine Delnor Metabolic Health and Surgical Weight Loss Center to actively work to reduce the risk and exposure of our patient population by transitioning to telehealth when able.

### **What are the common comorbidities for patients with obesity?**

The prevalence of metabolic disorders such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and dyslipidemia increases in those with obesity. Other common comorbidities include obstructive sleep apnea, fatty liver disease, and worsening joint pain and dysfunction, to name a few.

### **How can health improve with weight loss?**

There can be significant improvement in metabolic disorders with weight loss, including but not limited to improved insulin resistance, improved blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Improvement in obesity-related medical issues and metabolic derangements can appear with as little as 5-10% total body weight loss. This can be achieved through active lifestyle changes including focusing on a healthier diet and exercise regimen. The benefits of pursuing a healthier lifestyle in relation to COVID-19 are not fully elucidated, but the benefits to metabolic health are well-known.