



Frequently Asked Questions: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID) and Older Adults March 9, 2020

Are older adults at a higher risk from COVID-19?

Yes. The progression of COVID-19 worldwide shows that older adults (over age 60) are at a higher risk of serious illness, or in some cases death, from this virus. People are also at higher risk who have serious chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, or compromised immunities. If you are an older adult **and** you have one or more chronic health conditions, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.

If I am older, what do I do if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in my community?

If a COVID-19 outbreak happens in your community, it could last for a long time. (An outbreak is when a large number of people suddenly get sick.) Depending on how severe the outbreak is, public health officials may recommend community actions to reduce people's risk of being exposed to COVID-19. These actions can slow the spread and reduce the impact of disease. If COVID-19 is spreading in your community, take extra measures to put distance between yourself and other people, and stay home if possible.

What can I do as an older adult to be prepared?

- Have supplies on hand
 - Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications to have on hand. If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
 - Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, thermometer) to treat fever and other symptoms.
 - Have enough household items, groceries, and water on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home for a period of time.
 - Consider ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks if you are forced to stay home longer than your supplies allow.
 - Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc. if you become sick.
 - Determine who can provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick
- Require that **anyone** entering your home must wash hands, immediately. Post a reminder note in the foyer. Have alcohol-based hand sanitizer available for those visiting meals-on-wheels, delivering home care, or entering for any other reason.
- Wash hands after putting away groceries, touching money, anything that comes from outside the home. Clean your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place.
- Use commercial cleaning products to wipe high-touch points often, such as:
 - Canes, walker grips, wheelchair arms, push handles and brake handles
 - handrails and commode chair handrails
 - Reacher/grabber handles
 - faucets, doorknobs, and refrigerator handles
 - telephones and remotes
 - light switches
 - pill boxes

What if I have to go out in public?

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick; stay at least 6 feet away from them
- Avoid crowds, especially in poorly ventilated spaces. Your risk of exposure to respiratory viruses like COVID-19 may increase in crowded, closed-in settings with little air circulation if there are people in the crowd who are sick.

What are the warning signs for COVID-19 illness?

If you develop **emergency warning signs** for COVID-19 seek medical attention immediately. In adults, emergency warning signs include:*

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

**This list is not all-inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptom that is severe or concerning.*

What if I get sick?

- Stay home and call your primary care physician.
- Tell your doctor or healthcare provider if you may have been exposed to COVID-19. This will help them take care of you and keep other people from getting infected or exposed.
- Seek medical attention immediately if you have any of the emergency warning signs listed above or are concerned about other symptoms.

What can others do to support older adults?

- Know what medications your older loved one is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- Check in with any older friends or family members regularly by email or phone to see if they need assistance.
- If you care for a loved one living in a care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of the other residents frequently and know the protocol if there is an outbreak.

What is being done for long-term and managed care facilities?

Long-term care facilities should be vigilant to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have information for long-term care facilities here: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html)

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is working with Maryland long-term care facilities to ensure they are prepared for COVID-19. MDH has provided education to facilities about the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and has asked facilities to be particularly vigilant in recognizing and reporting potential cases of COVID-19. Additionally, facilities have been asked to monitor their staff for signs of respiratory illness, to review and update visitor policies, to re-educate staff about infection prevention practices such as hand washing, to take inventory of available personal protective equipment (PPE), and to create plans to prepare for PPE shortages. MDH has held COVID-19 webinars for long-term care facilities and continues to communicate with them to ensure the safety of residents there.

