



# Staying Safe at Home During the Coronavirus Crisis

To avoid being exposed to the coronavirus, it's important for everyone to stay at home. This is particularly true for older adults and people with some chronic conditions, who have a higher risk for complications from COVID-19—the illness caused by the coronavirus. The Eldercare Locator and the Alliance for Aging Research have teamed up to bring you the facts—so you can keep yourself and loved ones safe and healthy during this public health emergency.

## Why Older Adults and People with Chronic Conditions are at Higher Risk

Our immune systems weaken as we age, making it harder to fight off infectious diseases. Cancer treatment, immune deficiencies, smoking and prolonged use of medications that weaken the immune system can also make it harder for the body to fight off the virus. People with certain chronic health conditions—including heart disease, lung diseases, obesity, diabetes or liver disease—also have a harder time fighting the virus.

## Protecting Yourself

**There is currently no vaccine available to prevent COVID-19 and no medication to treat it, so the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus.** COVID-19 is thought to spread primarily through respiratory droplets from coughs or sneezes. It may also be transmitted after you have

touched a surface or object with the virus on it and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises older adults to:

- Stay home
- If you do need to go out in public, stay at least 6 feet apart from others and wear a simple cloth face covering to help prevent the spread of the disease to others
- Avoid high-touch surfaces like elevator buttons, door handles and counters. If you must touch these surfaces, use a tissue or disposable wipe to touch them
- Don't touch your face, nose, eyes or mouth
- Wash your hands with soap and water often; hand sanitizers are ok to use if they contain at least 60% alcohol

## Symptoms of COVID-19

Not everyone with COVID-19 will experience symptoms, or the symptoms may be mild enough that you don't realize you are infected, even though you are contagious. Symptoms of COVID-19 typically appear 2 to 14 days after exposure and may include:

- Fever
- Cough (usually a dry or unproductive cough)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Loss of smell and taste
- Body aches
- Nausea, diarrhea, stomach aches or vomiting

## What to Do if You Get Sick

Call your health care provider if you think you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and begin to develop symptoms. They can advise you on whether to get tested for the virus. **In most cases, it's best to stay at home to avoid infecting others—or becoming infected yourself.**

Most people who become infected with COVID-19 can recover at home. For some people, however, the virus can be serious or fatal. Call 911 and seek immediate medical care if you experience:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- Confusion not experienced previously
- Bluish lips or face
- Any other severe symptoms

## Protecting Yourself from Scams

Unfortunately, there are scammers trying to take advantage of this crisis by pretending to sell you tests or medicines. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau ([www.consumerfinance.gov](http://www.consumerfinance.gov)), the best defense is to say NO to anyone you don't know who contacts you (by phone, in person,

by text message or email) and asks for your Social Security Number, bank account number, credit card information, Medicare ID number, driver's license number or any other personally identifiable information.

## Need Support to Stay Safe at Home?

Every community has resources to help older adults age well at home—for example, programs that provide home-delivered meals, transportation to medical appointments, in-home services, resources for caregivers and other supports that can help older adults live independently and safely at home. While some activities are paused during this crisis, especially those that bring people together in group settings, local Area Agencies on Aging are adapting programs to meet the increasing need for social engagement.

Older adults and caregivers can always contact their local Area Agency on Aging to find out what help may be available locally. To learn what's available in your area, contact the Eldercare Locator at (800) 677-1116 or [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov). You can also get answers to commonly asked questions about the pandemic at [www.coronavirus.gov](http://www.coronavirus.gov).

In your community, contact:



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April 2020 / Updated versions may be found at [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov) or [www.agingresearch.org/COVID19safety](http://www.agingresearch.org/COVID19safety).

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