

COVID-19 related information for the Elderly

While most people with COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, will experience mild symptoms similar to a cold or the flu, elderly are more vulnerable to get very sick. Evidence shows that adults aged 60 years and older or those with chronic medical conditions (such as heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes) seem to be at highest risk of complications and fatality rates.

There are several reasons for the same. Older people don't have as strong an immune system, so they are more vulnerable to infectious diseases. They're also more likely to have conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or kidney disease, which weaken their body's ability to fight infectious disease.

They could also be living in institutionalised settings like a nursing or old age home or living with family in a more crowded situation where there's a greater risk of infection. The elderly might also have isolation or mobility challenges. Because of isolation, they might not get information about what to do or they're not able to get food they need if stores are out of stock and things become more difficult.

Here are a few things that the elderly and their family members and caregivers can do to reduce their risks:

- Take everyday preventive actions such as cleaning hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds (if soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol), avoid touching surfaces in public places to the extent possible, clean and disinfect home to remove germs, avoid touching your face, nose, and eyes, etc.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick – stay at least six feet away
- Avoid crowded places and social/community gatherings, especially in poorly ventilated places, such as places of worship, community centres, etc.
- Avoid all non-essential travel, especially use of public transport, as much as possible
- Be sure you have enough supplies of food for at least two weeks and over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Most people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home
- If there is a positive case in your community/family, stay home as much as possible and consider ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks
- Caregivers should practice extra precaution themselves and the family should have a backup plan to care for the elderly in case the caregiver gets sick

- If the elderly are already in an old age home or senior care facility, their family should verify that these facilities are following proper precautions. Families have to weigh the care that their elderly could get in a facility versus if they took them home, if they might be able to provide that care
- Old age homes or senior care facilities should be vigilant to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19
- While at home, the elderly should be encouraged to walk in the hallways or around the room. It is important to not just sit or lie down all day for overall health
- Watch for potential COVID-19 symptoms including fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and reach out to family and medical professionals if you do feel any of these symptoms. Keep the local helpline number handy, in case you need to reach out
- In terms of psychosocial support, families should make sure to call elderly on a regular basis to avoid social isolation

References

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
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- <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-elderly-older-people-health-risk/>
- <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/12/qa-how-to-care-for-the-elderly-without-putting-them-at-risk-of-coronavirus/>