

Helpful tips for family caregivers

## The coronavirus (COVID-19)



COVID-19 is spread much like the flu—through coughs and sneezes that put tiny droplets in the air.

Symptoms may not appear until 2–14 days after exposure. And many have symptoms that seem much like a cold, so they don't think to alter their behavior.

**That means people can spread the virus without knowing it.**

**Eight out of 10 deaths from**

**COVID occur in persons 65 and older.** Persons hit the hardest are frail older adults. Also those of any age who smoke or are overweight or have cancer, diabetes, or a heart, kidney, or lung condition.

## Planning

As a family caregiver, plan ahead just in case:

- Designate a separate room and bathroom for persons who become sick.
- Prepare a box of supplies for the sickroom, including items such as acetaminophen, a thermometer, and a pulse-oximeter (clips onto the finger and measures heartrate and blood oxygen levels). Also pack separate bedding, towels, dishes, and silverware.
- Assemble an Emergency Medical Document Kit with
  - a list of emergency contact people (friends, family, health care power of attorney)
  - a current list of your loved one's doctors, pharmacies, and local hospital
  - A current list of medications and known medical conditions
  - Your loved one's advance directive
- Bookmark the online Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) coronavirus page ([cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/)). Also, find your regional public health department website ([naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory](https://naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory/)) for local policies and conditions.
- If the person you care for does not live with you, plan how they will get medicine, food, and supplies during an illness or potential lockdown. In addition, plan for who might monitor their condition and call the doctor—or 911—should illness occur.



"It sure helps to know how I can plan ahead. Also how to prevent getting this virus, and what to do if we do get it."

**888-607-6027,  
TOLL-FREE**

The Aging Space supports older adults and their families in Metro West, greater Worcester and the Blackstone Valley. Give us a call at 888-607-6027, toll-free to find out how we can support you.



## Caring for someone who is ill

### Classic signs of COVID-19

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

**Call the doctor.** They will guide you concerning testing. Ask about strategies for easing symptoms.

### Care at home

- Follow viral prevention strategies. (See next article.)
- Give lots of fluids and encourage rest.
- Employ the doctor's recommendations to improve breathing, reduce fevers, and ease discomfort.
- Monitor the patient's symptoms.
- Isolate the patient in a separate room, ideally with its own bathroom not used by others in the house.
- Use disposable facemasks and gloves when in the same room, and when you touch or have contact with the patient's blood, stool, or body fluids such as saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine. Throw out the disposables after using them. Do not reuse.
- Avoid sharing household items such as dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items. Wash these items thoroughly after use.
- Clean laundry thoroughly with normal detergent and set the dryer at its highest temperature.
  - Immediately remove and wash clothes or bedding that have blood, stool, or body fluids on them.
  - Wear disposable gloves while handling soiled items and keep soiled items away from your body.
- Place all used tissues, disposable gloves, and facemasks in a lined container. Tie off before placing in the trash.
- Isolate pets from the person who is sick. There is some evidence that pets can contract COVID-19.
- Turn away visitors who do not have an essential need to be in the home.
- Monitor your own symptoms. Have a Plan B for who will care for you and the patient if you become sick.

### Call 911 if the patient has

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake up or stay awake
- Lips or face turning blue

## Viral prevention strategies

Because there is no cure for COVID-19, your best protection is to follow these guidelines put out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### At home

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Do this when arriving back from an outing, but also after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Be sure to clean the backs of your hands as well as the palms. Also clean between your fingers and under your nails. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, cabinet handles, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables.
  - Use a household cleaning spray or wipe. You can make a cleaning solution of detergent and water.
  - Follow instructions for safe and effective use of purchased disinfecting solutions. A solution of 70% alcohol can be used to disinfect. You can also make a disinfectant with 4 tsp of bleach (5.25% – 8.25% strength) to 1 quart of room temperature water. Use within 24 hours.
- Limit contact with children and teens. They often have no symptoms and can inadvertently infect others.

### Outside the home, or with people from other households

- Avoid close contact with others (social distancing). Stand at least 6 feet away, indoors or out.
- Especially limit time spent indoors with persons outside your household.
- Consult local health department policies about the wearing of facemasks. Facemasks protect the people who are wearing them as well as nearby others.

Contact us at 888-607-6027, toll-free

