How to Protect Yourself and Your Family during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Especially Those at High Risk: People with Disabilities and Older People

What is coronavirus disease 2019?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person.

It can be harder on people with disabilities

- It can be more difficult for people with disabilities to follow the recommended steps to avoid catching the virus, possibly due to different physical or mental abilities they may have.
- For most, COVID-19 has caused a change in daily routines, which for some with special needs may be more difficult to understand and accept, especially those who rely on standard routines and schedules.
- It is yet confirmed, but a concern of the potential that COVID-19 can cause long term effects on someone’s health.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of:

- fever
- cough
- shortness of breath

Tips to help keep you and your family safe.

- Stay at home as much as possible, especially if COVID-19 is spreading in your community.
- Make sure you have access to several weeks of medications and supplies in case you need to stay home for prolonged periods of time. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has great resources to help you plan ([www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)).
- Document the details of the needs and daily routine of your household members, especially those with special needs. CDC’s planning resources can help ([www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)).
- Create an emergency contact list. Include emergency contacts for family, friends, and health care providers; especially for a person with a disability or an older person.
- Practice good hygiene:
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after touching any frequently used item or surface.
  - If you don’t have access to soap, use hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid touching your face. Use a tissue instead.
  - Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
  - Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from others.
If you or your loved one has symptoms, call your health care provider. They will give you instructions on how to get care without exposing other people to your illness.

Tips for people with disabilities

- Call medical providers: There may be ways to connect over the phone, via telehealth, or for the provider to call-in prescription(s) for pick-up at drive-through pharmacies.
- Contact your local food bank and grocery stores for assistance with supplies. If available in your area, consider grocery deliveries.
- Social Security Administration payments for social security benefits and supplemental security income will continue. In person meetings are suspended and walk-ins aren’t accepted, however, they may possibly meet via phone instead. Call your local office for assistance.

For more information, visit www.ssa.gov, call your local office, or call the main toll free line 1-800-772-1213.

- Contact therapists for instruction on how to continue therapies in person or virtually, or if at-home visits are a possibility for those that received therapy outside of the home normally.
- If you rely on medical or adaptive equipment (wheelchairs, specialized lifts, infusion pumps, etc.) schedule any maintenance or repairs. If already scheduled, perhaps call your equipment vendor and see if they can bump up the date so it can be checked earlier. Ask about options to connect virtually to review or troubleshoot equipment questions.
- Be neighborly. Check in on neighbors, friends, and family; especially those with a disability or older adults to ensure they have what they need. Respect social distancing preferences and seek to connect with others in ways that are meaningful to them. How do you know? Ask. And while you’re at it, ask “how are you really doing?” Connecting reduces isolation and loneliness and has a positive impact on mental health (yours, too!).
Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Social Security Administration
www.ssa.gov

Easterseals

The Arc
www.thearc.org/covid

Autism Society
www.autism-society.org/covid-19