

NIA Advice for Caregivers of Older Adults during COVID-19

According to the [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#), older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for developing more severe complications from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Learn how you can be an effective caregiver while also taking care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic. Always follow guidelines from [PHAC](#), and consider the following tips:

What you can do

- **Use healthy practices.** As a caregiver you should take all the precautions you can to avoid becoming infected yourself. Ensure that your loved one is also taking precautions. Here are the basics:
 - [Clean your hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the time it takes you to sing “Happy Birthday” twice). Soap and water are always preferable, but if they are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or do so into your elbow. Throw away used tissues in a lined trash can. Immediately wash your hands.
 - Wear a face cover or mask when caring for individuals considered at high risk for serious illness from COVID-19.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Clean and disinfect household surfaces daily and ‘high touch’ surfaces frequently throughout the day. High touch surfaces include: tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, remotes controls, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, and include mobility and medical equipment, such as walkers, wheelchairs, canes and handrails. Learn more about [cleaning and disinfecting from Health Canada](#).
- **Create a caring support team** made up of several trusted individuals that can help you perform some key caregiving tasks. Assign them practical things that they can do to help, for example, phoning your loved one regularly, helping with errands, getting groceries, doing online shopping, and setting up telemedicine services for your loved one (i.e., medical appointments over the phone or by video). Find out about trusted services that may be available in your community, such as local nonprofits offering food delivery, and houses of worship offering online religious services.
- **Plan for what you will do if you or your loved one gets sick.** Have a care plan in place for yourself and help your loved one develop a care plan, too. A care plan summarizes your health conditions, medications, healthcare providers, emergency contacts, and end-of-life

care options, for example, advance directives (a living will). Help your loved one to consult with their doctor by phone to complete their care plan. [Advance Care Planning Canada](#) guidance from Canadian Health Care Professionals on developing a care plan. Determine who will care for you and your loved one should you become ill. Make sure that they understand both of your medical needs, and that they have a copy of each of your care plans.

- **Ensure that you and your loved one follow the directions of your provincial/territorial and municipal authorities.** Check your provincial/territorial and regional websites for timelines, closures, and local information on COVID-19 and how it affects your community.
- **Advise your loved one to stay home as much as possible.** Help them to avoid all non-essential outings, and large and small gatherings in private and in public. If they do have to go out, help them to practice social distancing, also called “physical distancing” by ensuring that they keep 6 feet or 2 meters between themselves and others while in public and to avoid close contact with people who do not share their home. Also, help your loved one cover their mouth and nose with a cloth face cover if they must go out in public. PHAC recommends that cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance. For detailed information, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/instructions-sew-no-sew-cloth-face-covering.html>
- **Help your loved one stay connected.** Help your loved one stay in touch with their friends and family through frequent phone calls, video calls, text, or email.
- **Limit visits with family members, especially young children.** While family members can help run errands, your older loved one should always keep about 6 feet or 2 meters away from them. Have visitors leave food or grocery items at the door rather than entering the home. Avoid inviting young children into the home because it is difficult for them to effectively practice and understand the importance of physical distancing.
- **Ensure that your loved one has a 1-month supply of medications and a 2-week supply of food to avoid frequent shopping trips and limit their potential exposure to the virus.**
 - A 1-month supply of prescription medication includes over-the-counter medications like cough suppressants and fever reducing drugs. Ask their pharmacy if prescriptions can be delivered to their home, or if you can pick up their medicines using a drive thru. Order medication refills for them as you normally would. Consider having on hand a thermometer and supplies of distilled water for CPAP machines if needed.
 - A 2-week supply of food also includes water, household cleaning and disinfection supplies, bar or liquid soap, paper products, personal hygiene items, and medical supplies or equipment. Contact their local grocery stores to see if they offer online ordering with options for contact-free home delivery or curbside pick-up.
- **Cancel all non-essential, in-person doctor’s appointments.** Use telemedicine services, which enables you to communicate with your doctor over video, phone or email, rather than face-to-face. A friend or family member may be able to help you arrange this. Know the COVID-19 symptoms and additional steps you may be able to take to protect yourself; see

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/about-coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

- **Beware of scams.** Unfortunately, scammers are taking advantage of people's fears and the [Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre](#) and [Google](#) has tips to help protect you and others. There currently are no vaccines, pills, lotions or other prescription or over-the-counter products available to treat or cure COVID-19 online or in stores. Beware of "viral videos" suggesting potentially dangerous or toxic home preventatives, such as drinking excessive amounts of water or mouthwash. Report fraud to the [Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre](#).

Coping with Stress

Fear and anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Please see <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19> for information on coping with stress.

Additional Resources

- Government of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>
- Canadian Red Cross: <https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/current-emergency-responses/covid-19-%E2%80%93-novel-coronavirus>
- Self-Assessment Tools: <https://www.nia-ryerson.ca/self-assessment-tools-across-canada>
- Financial Support for Canadians: <https://www.nia-ryerson.ca/financial-support-for-canadians-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>
- Find a food bank near you: <https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/utility-pages/find-a-food-bank.aspx>
- If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or someone else, call 911 or find a [Crisis Centre](#) near you: <https://suicideprevention.ca/need-help/>