



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

CORONAVIRUS CONCERNS FOR OLDER ADULTS

As researchers learn more about the coronavirus, public health guidelines have advised that a person's age appears to be associated with higher risks of infection. Those who are immunocompromised (have weakened immune systems, reducing the ability to fight infections and other diseases) due to cancer treatment also face additional concern. Here are some tips on how to help ensure you or your loved one are secure.

REDUCING PHYSICAL CONTACT

Even if your national, state or local government has not issued a "shelter-in-place" order, it is best to practice social distancing as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This involves refraining from going outside unless absolutely necessary and reducing direct contact with others, including loved ones. The coronavirus can be highly infectious, even from those who do not show any symptoms.

A caregiver or other volunteer may be able to help with groceries and other errands, including from organizations like United Way or a spiritual center such as a church or synagogue. Many stores also offer delivery service. Parcels and deliveries can be left outside your door. If anyone needs to enter, they should wash their hands with soap and water immediately upon entry, with hand sanitizer a secondary option (with 70% alcohol content). Wearing a mask that covers the nose and mouth is strongly suggested, as they can help reduce transmission of the virus. Be sure to clean common surfaces with household disinfectant or a diluted bleach solution (1/3 cup bleach per gallon of water, as recommended by the CDC).

If you must travel outside, maintain six feet of distance between yourself and others and do not touch high-contact surfaces such as door knobs, elevator buttons and hand rails without gloves or a cloth. Do not touch your face, as the infection can enter through your mouth, nose and eyes, and once you return home, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

For more advice, refer to our fact sheet "Managing the Practical Concerns of Social Distancing."

FAMILY AND LOVED ONES

Minimizing direct contact includes contact with loved ones and caregivers who are not part of your household. While it may be difficult to refrain from in-person visits, it is best to be safe. If you or your loved one is in a care facility, consider moving them to more secure surroundings.

Fortunately, making virtual contact is easy. Video-conferencing services allow you to check in with others and speak to them face-to-face, even allowing for multiple people to join together for virtual dinner parties, playing games or group exercise. These applications include FaceTime, Skype, Zoom and Google Hangouts and are usually free. Ask a friend or family member to help set you up or drop off a device for you to use. As with any item entering the home, be sure to clean it with a sanitizing wipe or household spray, but be careful, as too much moisture could damage the device.

You can also record video messages and special occasions for loved ones to remain connected. While these technologies can appear complicated at first, with a little practice they can be enormously beneficial. If you do not have access to video programs, you can stay connected to loved ones through email or text message. If you do not have access to the internet, try sending a letter or making a phone call.

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YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

Your health care team is likely already making changes to how they are handling the coronavirus. To keep patients safe and to best use their facility's resources, there is a chance treatments may be postponed, rescheduled or adjusted into a new format, such as oral chemotherapy.

Doctors may switch consultations to telemedicine, which uses video-conferencing technology so you can see and hear your doctor through video from their office instead of meeting in person. Communicate with your team as soon as possible to ensure you understand and agree with any changes that are made. Discuss options for medications to be delivered through the mail, and ask your doctor if it's appropriate for them to authorize a larger prescription order (a 60-day supply instead of a 30-day supply, for example) to reduce the need for more pharmacy visits.

If you are still scheduled for appointments at a hospital or other clinical facility, ask about any changes in operation, such as which entrances are open and rules about visitors. If you drive to appointments, you may wish to call the front desk to let them know that you have arrived but will wait in your vehicle until they are ready for you.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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YOUR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Uncertainty and avoiding direct contact with others can be trying. In addition to maintaining your social network remotely, occupying yourself with activities can make the time pass in fruitful ways. Try to maintain a gentle exercise routine. Stay mentally sharp with a daily schedule and a mix of hobbies, such as writing about your experiences or listening to music. Balance the amount of news you consume with quieter, gentler moments. Seek peace and relaxation with a cup of tea or coffee, lingering by a window or finding other moments of spirituality and mindfulness. For more ideas, consult our fact sheet "Managing the Emotional Impacts of Social Distancing."

There is no need to go through this alone. Individuals and organizations can help. If you already have a counselor or therapist, explore the possibility of online or telephone counseling to prevent unnecessary exposure. CancerCare continues to offer support services over the phone with master's-level oncology social workers and through support groups. Call our toll-free Hopeline at 800-813-HOPE (4673) or visit www.cancercares.org to learn more.

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This fact sheet is supported by a contribution from GlaxoSmithKline, Lilly, Novartis Oncology and Seattle Genetics.



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