**Guidance for Caregivers**

**to Address Concerns Related Social Distancing**

Caregivers face special challenges during this time of self-isolation. The person in your care needs you to be physically healthy and emotionally strong, which can feel overwhelming during a crisis. Below are guidelines to help caregivers through the days ahead. Staying connected to friends and having access to information from qualified professionals in your community is the best way to maintain peace of mind.

1. **Create a Household Plan That Practices Prevention**

This includes following CDC Guidelines for frequent handwashing and limiting contact with individuals other than the person in your care, especially if the person has underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. Practice everyday preventive actions now, and teach everyone in your household how to stay safe from the spread of respiratory illnesses:

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Always wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.
2. Avoiding close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet).
3. Stay home when you are sick, except to get needed medical care.
4. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
5. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet, refrigerator and appliance handles).
6. For disinfection, a list of products with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved emerging viral pathogens claims, maintained by the American Chemistry Council Center for Biocide Chemistries (CBC), is available at [Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Fighting Productspdf iconexternal icon](https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf). Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
7. **Enlist extra help by phone:** Enlist help from neighbors, friends and relatives (or contact a local faith organization, ADRC or volunteer organization if you don’t have acquaintances who can help) by phone, not by inviting them to your house. Discuss what you and the care recipient are likely to need during self-isolation, and ask people to volunteer to make sure each need gets met. Now is the time to let others take on some of the tasks you’ve been doing as the primary caregiver so that you don’t have to leave the house and risk heightened exposure to the COVID-19 virus.
8. **Know who is a greatest risk:** There is limited information about [who may be at risk for severe complications from COVID-19 illness](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/high-risk/high-risk-complications.html). From the data that are available for COVID-19 patients, and from data for related coronaviruses such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, it is possible that older adults and persons who have underlying chronic medical conditions may be at risk for more serious complications. Early data suggest older people are more likely to have serious COVID-19 illness. If you or your household members are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications, please consult with your health care provider for more information about monitoring their health and symptoms.
9. **Contact your neighbors:** Talk by phone with neighbors about being a resource for each other in times of emergency. Or shout over a backyard fence to introduce yourself if you don’t know your neighbors’ names. Keep a list of names and phone numbers readily available, and ask for an email address “just in case.” If your neighborhood has a website or social media page, consider joining it to maintain access to neighbors, information, and resources.
10. **Create an emergency contact list.** Your doctor should be at the top of this list. Also ensure your household has a current list of emergency contacts for family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, health care providers, teachers, employers, the local public health department, and other community resources.
11. **Post a list of organizations in your community.** Create a list of local organizations that you and your family members can contact for information, health care services, support, and resources. Your local **Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)** and [WisconsinCaregiver.org](http://wisconsincaregiver.org/about-us) should be at the top of the list. Also consider including organizations that provide mental health or counseling services, food, and other supplies.

In response to direction from the CDC, many ADRCs are taking precautionary steps to protect the more vulnerable population they serve by changing some services to customers. Please call to find out details of your local ADRC as the following guidelines are being enforced at varying degrees across the state.

* Suspension of classes and support groups
* Suspension of in-home and in-office visits
* Closure of congregate dining sites (with options for picking up a meal instead)

1. **Choose a room in your home that can be used to separate sick household members from those who are healthy.** Identify a separate bathroom for the sick person to use, if possible. Plan to clean these rooms, as needed. [Learn how to care for someone with COVID-19 at home.](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html)
2. **Discuss your needs with your employer.** Learn if telework is an option or if leave options are available. Emphasize that someone else’s health is dependent on you remaining well, too.
3. **Take care of your emotional health needs.** Make time to unwind. Call a friend or spiritual support, take a bubble bath, or listen to music that makes you feel good. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories about COVID-19. Connect with family and friends by phone or video-chat. Share concerns, and let others know how you are feeling.
4. Take advantage of **virtual supports** such as webinars, message boards, tele-events, etc. from the following organizations.
5. [**Alzheimer’s Association**](https://alz.org/help-support/community) - 24/7 Helpline – 800-272-3900 They also offer a variety of online and virtual supports. Start with [these helpful tips for dealing with COVID-19](https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-(covid-19)-tips-for-dementia-care).
6. [**ALZConnected**](https://www.alzconnected.org/) is a free, online community for anyone affected by Alzheimer’s or other dementia such as message boards and a Caregivers Forum.
7. [**Caregiver Teleconnection**](https://www.wellmedcharitablefoundation.org/caregiver-support/caregiver-teleconnection/) – weekly live call-in events as well as archived programs all relating to caring for someone who is older or disabled.
   1. The March 18 call at 1:00 p.m. is [Coping with the Coronavirus Outbreak while Caregiving](https://www.wellmedcharitablefoundation.org/caregiver-support-caregiver-teleconnection-events/coping-with-the-coronavirus-outbreak-while-caregiving/)
8. [**Alzheimer’s Foundation of America**](https://alzfdn.org/webinar-archives/) has a toll free helpline (866-232-8484) and webinars that are accessible online.
9. In the absence of gathering with family and friends in person, **consider connecting via conference call or video conferencing**. [FreeConferenceCall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com/), [FreeConference.com](https://www.freeconference.com/) and [Zoom](https://zoom.us/zoomrooms?zcid=2438) are a few platforms that allow multiple people to talk or video-chat.
10. **If you have loved ones living in nursing homes or assisted living residences** be sure to call in advance to find out their most recent policies about visiting. The State Department of Health Services has issued guidance restricting visits to all residential care facilities.

Guidance from Department of Health Service: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/memos/communicable-diseases/2020-07.pdf>

1. **If you are caring for a grandchild or other young child**, check out these resources:
   1. [Talking with Children about Coronavirus Disease](file:///C:\Users\lynng_000\AppData\Local\Temp\1.%09https:\www.cdc.gov\coronavirus\2019-ncov\community\schools-childcare\talking-with-children.html)
   2. [Frequently Asked Questions – Coronavirus and Children](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/children-faq.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fchildren-faq.html)
   3. [Tips for Families - Coronavirus](https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus)
   4. If your child receives free or reduced school meals, contact the school to find out how these meals can be accessed during school closures.
2. **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.** Get up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity from the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services website](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm).