



# KEEPING SENIORS HEALTHY



**DURING THE COVID 19 OUTBREAK**

March 2020

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMERY**

Older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart, lung, or kidney disease at higher risk of contracting COVID 19 and having poorer outcomes. This is likely because as people age, their immune systems change, making it harder for their body to fight off diseases and infection and because many older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions that make it harder to cope with and recover from infections.

The best way to prevent contracting COVID 19 is to avoid exposure. The recommendation for older persons include but is not limited to:

- staying at home as much as possible
- limiting close contact with others
- washing hands often
- cleaning and disinfecting your surrounding

The Ministry of Health and Wellness is urging the elderly population to follow the tips outlined in the following pages, stay calm, keep up to date and share facts not fear.

## **BACKGROUND**

Older adults and people with underlying health conditions such as: heart disease, diabetes and lung disease are about twice as likely to become infected with COVID 19 and have more serious outcomes than younger, healthier people.

COVID-19 presents with mild respiratory symptoms, including a cough and fever but in some people it can be more severe and can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties. The virus can spread from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including in the 24 hours before they start showing symptoms)
- contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person and then touching your mouth or face

The best way to prevent or decrease your risk of COVID-19 infection is to avoid contacting infected people and the places they have visited. The recommendations especially handwashing, social distancing, and decontamination are of paramount importance. Infected people can help minimize the chance of infecting other people by strict quarantine procedures that keep the infection isolated from others.

## **TIPS TO STAY HEALTHY**

### ***1. Stay at home***

Older persons should stay at home to avoid exposure to the virus. They should only leave their homes to seek medical care. They are encouraged to call the nearest health centre or hospital to get advise on their medical condition before showing up. Cruises are out, as is all nonessential travel. Visits with children/grandchildren/neighbours are ill-advised.

### ***2. Avoid routine medical visits***

Dental checks and eye examinations should be discussed with your healthcare provider and where possible these should be postponed.

### ***3. Avoid public transportation and crowds***

#### ***4. Stock up on medication***

Ask your doctor to write your prescription for at least three months. Ensure you get the total amount from the pharmacist. Additionally, ensure you have over the counter medication for fever and pain (acetaminophen), vomiting and diarrhoea (oral rehydration salts) antibiotic ointment for minor cuts and bruises and miscellaneous items such as rubbing alcohol and smelling salts.

#### ***5. Stock up on food items***

The elderly should make use of the early opening hours of supermarkets (dedicated to seniors) when they go shopping. Please remember to make a list so the time spent in the supermarket is not long. If possible, call in and have the groceries prepacked and waiting for you. Alternatively, the goods may be delivered and placed outside your door.

#### ***6. Eat Properly***

It is important that balanced meals are prepared and eaten. If you have special needs consult with your health care provider for advise on preparation and the possible need for supplements.

#### ***7. Practice good personal health habits***

- Avoid close contact with people in your household who are sick.
- Limit close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet).
- Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue then promptly discard tissue in a bin.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles, bed side tables) using a regular household detergent and water (always follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products).
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice), 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 70% alcohol. Always wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.

#### ***8. Keep Updated***

Pay attention to the local news and the releases and updates from the Ministry of Health and Wellness. "If COVID-19 hits your community, please stay calm do not panic. Avoid close

contact with people who are sick; remember, some people with COVID-19 may be asymptomatic, so handwashing and cleaning surfaces is very important.

### ***9. Exercising / Going outside***

If you live in a private house, it is safe for you to go into your garden tend your fruits or flowers and get those stretches and walks in. If you live in an apartment or tenement, it is also safe for you to go into the garden but you should maintain social distancing with all those around and avoid hugging, kissing and hand shaking. You should also move quickly through common areas. On returning inside you should wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water and take a bath.

### ***10. Managing Stress***

Stress or distress may manifest itself in older persons as:

- fear and worry about your own health and the health of loved ones
- changes in sleep or eating patterns
- difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- worsening of chronic health problems

People with pre-existing mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.

#### ***a. Things you can do to support yourself***

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories and social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol.
- Connect with others. Call on the telephone, learn to use the internet, make Skype and What's App calls; reconnect with people you trust and share your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Develop intentional caregiver plans; know exactly who is going to look after you if you get sick and make preparations for them to come and stay with you or you with them.

## **HOW TO SUPPORT OLDER ADULTS**

People of all ages can support older adults during this time. Many older adults depend on services and supports provided in their homes or in the community to maintain their health and independence. Family members, neighbours, and caregivers should:

- know what medications your loved one is taking and ensure they have extra on hand and is taking them properly
- monitor food and other medical supplies (diapers, wound care items)
- ensure they have a sufficient stock of non-perishable food items to minimize trips to shop
- help with disinfecting frequently touched surfaces
- ensure they are not “isolated” but remain connected

The coronavirus epidemic is not going away any time soon. This means continued vigilance for our own health and special vigilance for that of seniors .

## REFERENCES

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