COVID-19: Supporting Older Adults

Data consistently show that adults over the age of 60 are at elevated risk for complications from COVID-19 relative to younger adults and children. This is especially true for adults with compromised immune systems, diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease. These tips from NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing Professor Dr. Tina Sadarangani, who specializes in health outcomes for older adults with chronic conditions, provide guidance for older adults and their caregivers. Additional resources are available on the CDC’s webpage for individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness caused by COVID-19.

Tip #1: Maintain Healthy Habits

• Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, or having been in a public place.

• Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, etc.

• Avoid crowds, especially in poorly ventilated spaces.

• Maintain six feet of distance between yourself and others – this is further than respiratory droplets can travel.

• Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

• Avoid non-essential travel, including plane trips, but especially embarking on cruise ships.

• Clean and disinfect surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, faucets, and cell phones.

Tip #2: Reduce Stress

• Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19.

• Take care of your body: eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise, get lots of sleep, drink water and avoid alcohol, take deep breaths, or meditate. It is never too late to improve physical fitness.

• Connect with others and share concerns about how you are feeling.

• Maintain a steady routine and positive attitude. Talk about your feelings about the outbreak, share reliable health information, and enjoy conversation unrelated to the outbreak to remind yourself of important and positive things in your life.

• Check in on neighbors and introduce technology to mitigate loneliness. Teach neighbors to use Facetime, Whatsapp or Skype to communicate with family, friends, and grandchildren.

• If stress interferes with daily activities for multiple days in a row, contact your healthcare provider by phone.
Tip #3: Caregivers Should be Prepared

- Know and maintain a list of the medications you or your loved one requires. Contact your healthcare provider to ensure you have a two-week supply of prescription and over-the-counter medications.

- Monitor other medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and ensure sufficient quantities are on hand.

- Stock up on non-perishable food items to have on hand in your home to minimize trips to stores.

- If you have a loved one living in a care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of the other residents frequently, and know the protocol if there is an outbreak.

- If your loved one receives community-based services, such as home-delivered meals or adult day services, confirm that there will be no disruptions in these services, and have a back-up plan in place

- Get your flu shot. We are still in the middle of flu season which also disproportionately impacts older adults. While there is no vaccine for coronavirus, it is not too late to get your flu shot, which studies have shown substantially reduces the risk of dying from the flu.

- Have a plan if you get sick.
  - Consult with your health care provider for more information about monitoring your health for symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
  - Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, and others if you become sick.
  - Determine who can provide your loved one with care if you get sick.

For additional information about NYU’s mitigation efforts to fight COVID-19, please visit nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/coronavirus-information. For more information from NYU's Office of Community Engagement, please contact us at community.engagement@nyu.edu.